

THE PENGUIN NEW WRITING

Edited by
JOHN LEHMANN

33



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J. F. POWERS published his first story in the American magazine *Accent* four years ago. His second story *Lions, Harts, Leaping Does* won the O. Henry Memorial Award for 1944. The story printed here is taken from a collection *The Prince of Darkness* which appeared in America in 1947, and will shortly be published in an English edition over here.

ANGELOS SIKELIANOS is one of the most distinguished living Greek poets and occupies a unique position in modern Greek life. Before the war he organized the Delphic Festivals of 1927 and 1930.

FOREWORD

It has always been the aim of *Penguin New Writing* to present the work not only of modern European authors, but also of English-speaking authors from overseas, not least from America. During the war our opportunities were inevitably limited, but we managed in spite of all obstacles to print occasional stories, poems and articles by many of the outstanding French, Greek and Czech talents of to-day. The Dominions were represented by a small, select band, the most notable among whom was Frank Sargeson; but rare indeed were the appearances of the Americans, though the Editor was only too willing to welcome them. The love seemed all on one side; or was it that the alluring figure of the American magazine-editor stood in between, waving his wad of greenbacks? Bygones, however, we hasten to add, shall be bygones; for in the present number, beside the contributions of André Gide, Angelos Sikelianos and Antonio Baldini (not to mention their British contemporaries), the reader will find stories by two distinguished Americans; and we can promise him that it will not be the last occasion he will meet these authors – and some interesting figures among their colleagues as well.

While the war lasted the young American, like the young British, author had the claims of National Service to meet. This was a toll they recognized, by and large, as honourable and necessary; but now, three years after the end of the fighting, the unfortunate British author is threatened with having to pass a gate at which he may be pardoned for thinking the dues far less justified, far more insidious. In their efforts to catch up into the wheels of production a mysterious class of person who, in a burst of unwonted zoological fancy, they have described as drones, eels and butterflies, our present masters have decreed that the young author, in order to claim exemption from this new industrial call-up,

must prove that he writes for *at least thirty hours a week, with the intention of selling*. What an absurd picture of the creative faculty that first condition calls up! Who among the poets, except the fluent bores, could ever admit in honesty that he fulfilled it, regularly? Are the long intervals, when the wind of the imagination refuses to blow, to count – provided the author sits at his desk with pen and stopwatch in his hand? Can the one week of sixty hours' feverish work be spread over the sluggish fortnight that follows it? Do the solitary walks, the bouts of reading, the hours of discussion with friends, all so necessary to one kind of creative writer, qualify or disqualify? How much of the *Oxford Book of English Verse* would be left if all its contributors had had to satisfy officials under these rules? The second condition seems innocent enough, at first sight, for all writers nowadays (even the keepers of private journals) hope to publish and therefore to sell. But what if the question 'Do you intend to sell?' were to be followed by 'Do you in fact sell?' and 'Does what you earn amount to a minimum factory wage?' ... By such slight transitions can freedom be spirited away, culture fail, and the mind languish once more in chains.

JOHN LEHMANN

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P. H. NEWBY

CROWNING GLORY

‘Will you sell it?’ said the barber and Nora looked at his reflection in the mirror.

Her hair was the colour of harvest. His scissors had ceased clicking and he was gently lifting the fine strands with the tips of his fingers.

‘The loveliest hair I’ve ever seen,’ he said. ‘I’d rather as not you’d gone to someone else to cut your plaits off. It’s destruction. There’s something wanton in it. It’s like cutting down a great tree. You’re sure now you’ll not change your mind? It’s still not too late.’

‘I’m too big for plaits,’ she said.

‘Too big? You’re still a child. A woman’s chief glory, it’s her hair, you know. The village won’t be the same without *yours* to look at.’

‘I’m fifteen. Besides, I get headaches. The doctor said they’d best come off.’

The barber bulked up the mass of hair for the pleasure of seeing it catch and hold the sunlight. ‘And will you sell it after all?’ he said. ‘I’d give you a couple of pounds. No, I mean it. There’s a market for hair like this. Though I’d rather set it up in a show-case for the pleasure of looking at it.’

But no, Nora said, her mother had told her to be sure and bring her plaits home with her. Her plaits? That had been the first shock. For some time, ever since her mother had decided that plaits were old-fashioned and persuaded the

doctor to back up her point of view, Nora had been looking forward to having them cut off. But then, she had imagined that the process would be simpler. A quick snip! snip! of the barber's scissors (they had no ladies' hairdresser in the village) and the plaits, she had thought, would be put into her hand, complete and entire. But things had not worked out like that.

The barber placed a table at her right hand. On top of the table he placed a newspaper. Then he started to undo the plaits and drape the hair over her shoulders, talking with so much gentleness and so encouragingly that Nora knew he realized he was doing the unexpected. Only her mother had previously touched her hair in this way and for a moment Nora could almost persuade herself that the barber was indeed her mother until he did something so surprising, so much out of her mother's routine, that she lifted her eyes to the mirror. The barber was lifting and sifting her tresses, then snipping them off with the points of a large pair of scissors. And she had cried out before she remembered that it was for this that she had come. The barber paused in some concern.

'Hurt you?'

She shook her head, he smiled into the mirror, returned to his work and snipped off another tress. As he cut off the lengths of hair so he laid them side by side on top of the table. They lay like newly-reaped wheat, longer than his arm and stirring in the light breeze that was everywhere in the small bright shop that morning.

Nora could see the top of the table in the mirror. And whereas she had not, up to the time she had come into the shop, thought of the loss of her plaits with very much feeling either for or against, she now felt her skin itching with an emotion that was stronger than dismay but only part of the way along the track to horror. Her hair which, once severed from her head should have been dead, was still alive. The breeze played over it, the ends quivered and turned up, there was motion along the entire length of the tresses. She

would have been reluctant to touch them yet she stared at the little load the table was carrying, stared until she wanted to cry.

‘There, it’s all over, my lass,’ said the barber in a burst of cheerfulness. ‘Now if you’ll just hang on a minute I’ll get this little lot fixed up so you can take it home.’

But Nora did not wait. She could not. She felt upset, but it was due to something more than a realization of her loss or the thought that she had taken a step outside the magic circle of childhood. As soon as the scissors had finished their work and the barber began bundling up the hair for her to take home she was afraid. She wanted to run away and hide herself.

Without saying a word to the barber she stepped out into the village street and ran up the cobbled hill towards home. She had made her escape while the barber’s back had been turned, but now that he had noticed her absence and was standing on the step of his shop to shout after her she felt hunted. Passers-by on the other side of the street called across to her; but for Nora the barber’s shout was a shout of derision and all the other voices were cries of scorn.

Then she saw her father. Abruptly she slowed to a walk. Standing on the doorstep of his baker’s shop in his white shirt, his white apron that reached down to the toes of his flour-encrusted boots and on his head a high white hat, he was as tall and firm as a tower.

‘What would he say? Seeing him standing there in that frozen, aloof and almost splendid dignity Nora found new causes for alarm. Her mother and she had not consulted father about the plaits because – well, because it was the kind of thing it was hard to imagine Father getting interested in. His daughter’s hair? A small and personal matter that needed the kind of intimate talk he never held. He spoke at you directly and powerfully from a distance of six feet, the backside of a horse or the width of a trough in between. But Nora felt that she could not be sure about her father. All her apprehension – that apprehension that had been

born the moment she had looked at her severed tresses – all her fear of scorn, her sense of nakedness, were gathered up in the larger fear of what her father would say.

He looked at her and beckoned. She crossed the street and stood in front of him, looked up at the large blond moustache that was a colder, paler tone of the colour of her own hair, and listened. He was scolding her for running. 'Running about the place like a March hare,' he said and the words floated out to the faces of the whitewashed cottages opposite. He was not even looking at her.

'Yes, Daddie,' she said and entered the house through the yard where the bread was cooling and crackling in the racks. It had proved no relief that her father had not scolded her about her hair. It was, on the contrary, a wholly unexpected grief that he had not even noticed that she was no longer wearing her plaits.

'My, how smart you look!' Her mother was gay and bustling. 'Quite the young lady, eh? Well, I must say I'm glad it's all over and done with. What I say is this: long 'air is all very well for them as 'as the time to attend to it. Otherwise it's a dirt trap. And we're busy people. No, my girl, you've done a sensible thing.'

Nora did not like to take all the responsibility for the decision. Her mother had done all the urging. 'I feel awful,' she said. 'Sort of naked.'

Her mother said: 'Now I'm not going to have any nonsense like that.' She was bustling about with steaming saucepans and plates and colanders of vegetables. 'I believe in being in the swim. Whatever else people say about me they can't say I'm not in the fashion. I believe in it. It's up to me, I say to myself. And I'll see that my daughter does the same. Who wears plaits these days? Ask me that! Go on, ask me that and see what I say! No, my lass, Nora Godwin's going to be the smartest girl in the village or I'll know the reason why.'

And she meant it, every word of it. She was a plump and still pretty woman with dark eyes that were in surprising

contrast to her hair which, although it had once been the same colour as her daughter's, had now lost its warmth and animation and was clustered in small artificial curls all round her head. She had a fondness for strong, simple colours, she wore cherry-coloured ear-rings and a necklace of green shells.

'Of course,' she went on, wagging a cigarette between her lips, 'we won't be satisfied with just that.' She was twisting the ends of Nora's hair between her fingers. 'I think – just as a beginning, mind you – we'll get these ends permed up. Got to experiment. See how the hair takes to it.' She stood so close that the smoke from her cigarette made Nora's eyes water. 'By the way, what have you done with the plaits?'

Before Nora could answer the barber's daughter appeared at the window holding what were obviously the plaits wrapped up in newspaper.

'Dad says you forgot this,' said the little girl with great solemnity and Nora's mother gave her a cake for her trouble.

The package lay on the table. At one end it was torn and some strands of hair escaped. As the woman plucked at the paper there was a rattle of trays and pans from the bake-house; the second batch of bread was being drawn. The steamy sweetness of bread hot from the oven was wafted down the stone passage.

'What can we do with it? What's it good for?' said the woman in mock despair. There was, of course, no question of what was to be done with the hair. Nora knew that her mother had insisted on her bringing the plaits home from the barber's because the intention was to preserve them. They were going to be put away in a drawer with mothballs.

'Let's put it in the fire,' said Nora looking at her dead hair. The barber had worked it up into one short, fat plait that seemed to weigh very heavily on the crumpled newspaper. Yes, that was it! The plaits must be destroyed. Or if her mother could not be persuaded to do this then Nora did not want to know what her mother proposed doing with her

hair, she wanted to forget that it was in the house, did not want to hear it mentioned again.

But this was absurd, and her mother said so with an affectionate laugh. 'You wicked girl!' She wrapped the hair up once more. 'I'll make two neat plaits out of this and then you'll see how nice it is.'

'The barber said he'd give me two pounds for it. I want to sell it. It's no good.'

Her mother gave her a kiss and said something very flattering and delightful. 'I wouldn't sell it, my dear, for all the money in the world.'

From her mother, then, Nora could expect no understanding. But the girl wanted more than understanding. She wanted recognition of the importance of the change she was going through, she wanted presents, she wanted to wake up early in the morning to find the bed heavy with exciting brown parcels, she wanted the gaiety of a party; at the very least she wanted a kiss. But nobody would give her a kiss, certainly not the person from whom she most wanted love, her father. At meal-times especially she was tempted to call across to him: 'I say, what d'you think of the new way I've done my hair? I've lost my plaits, you know.' It should have been so simple. But although the words were frequently trembling on her lips she could never quite bring herself to pronounce them. Her father would be absorbed in his newspaper, he would be in a hurry to get out on the round, he would be talking of bills. It would have been pleasanter, of course, for him to notice the change for himself. But as time went by it was obvious that he would never notice the loss of her plaits and someone, it could not be herself, would have to tell him. Her mother, then? No she did not want her mother to tell Father, not at this stage. She was angry with her mother for not, by some hint, by some suggestion, having drawn her father's attention to the fact that the girl was now a woman.

Nora felt forsaken. She knew that the great occasion was being missed and her feelings were so intense that she made

an effort to escape from them. Happiness, she felt, did not depend on either her father or her mother; it depended on herself. She was calling herself to some act of celebration, her own, personal celebration of her young womanhood. When, therefore a gipsy woman looked in through the kitchen window the following Saturday morning and gave them an offer for the hair Nora felt that the dark Romany face (all they could see of the woman) was the creation of her own imagination.

It was the time that her mother had chosen to rearrange the hair. The task was much more difficult than either of them had anticipated. It was easy enough to unravel the slack plait that the barber had so rapidly made, but her idea of dividing the hair into two great tresses and so recreating the two plaits as Nora had worn them proved to be work for an expert. Even though they made one end of the tress firm under the weight of a flat-iron the plaiting was repeatedly coming to pieces under their fingers. If it was going to be anything of a job at all they would have to take the yard-long hairs one by one and knot them together at the ends. They stood back and looked at the hair. The window was open, the sunlight poured through, and the tresses ran like a river in the brightness.

At this point the Romany head appeared. The woman had come so silently and spoke with such little warning that they were both startled.

'How did you get in here?' Nora's mother demanded. The double gates that led into the yard were propped open – in a few minutes the baker would be starting out on his round – so the answer was obvious. 'No, nothing to-day, thank you,' Nora heard her mother saying. She had been startled and was getting her own back. She would not normally have spoken in this way. Dark Romany eyes looked out of a face that was wrinkled like a walnut. The gipsy woman smiled and Nora smiled. Then the dark eyes went down to the golden hair that was spread on the table.

'That's my hair,' said Nora brightly. She was surprised at

herself. 'I've just had it all cut off.' The gipsy woman had, she felt, come in answer to her own dark summons. From this impressive face, if from anyone, Nora would learn the answer to a question she could not even frame. How can I be happy? No, that was not it. She waited for the gipsy to speak, quite confident of the answer and suddenly gay. The sun left the gipsy woman's face in a kind of obscurity but she seemed to carry the light of the morning like a javelin upon her shoulder. She leaned forward – she must have been standing on tiptoe – and gazed at the hair.

'Nora!' said her mother in indignation, disturbed by her boldness. The morning paper was lying on the chair where her husband had left it after breakfast. She picked it up, opened it and spread it over the flow of hair feeling that, as she could not immediately force the gipsy woman away, the hair had to be protected from her eyes.

The Romany eyes followed every movement of her fingers. They stared at the newspaper.

'If it should cross your mind to sell the hair,' she said in a steady pure English, 'how much would you think of asking?' The gipsy was no longer a saleswoman of whatever she had brought in her basket. She was a purchaser. Her question was addressed to Nora.

'We're not going to sell. Will you please go away?' Nora's mother was hostile.

The gipsy woman hesitated. She showed a pair of fine white teeth. 'You think I'd sell it again and make a profit? No, my love, not with hair like that.' She stretched out a hand towards the table, but Nora's mother bundled the hair up under the newspaper and moved it away out of her reach. 'If I bought this hair I should keep it. It's beautiful hair.'

'How much would you give?' said Nora.

Her mother, scandalized, turned on her. 'Go to your room at once, Nora, you wicked girl. And as for you – if you're not off the premises within two seconds I'll call my man —'

'It's not *your* hair,' said Nora to her mother. 'It's mine. I'll do with it what I want.'

Her mother drew in her breath sharply.

The gipsy woman was talking. 'You can't keep it in the house anyway, my love. Dead hair under the roof will destroy you all. Your luck is in it, what d'you say? If it's not to me then it'll be to another. But you can't hold it any longer than you hold your breath.'

Nora's mother went to fetch her husband. When she returned the gipsy had gone and Nora was spreading the hair out over the table just as it had been before the arrival of the gipsy.

'What's going on?' said her father brusquely. He was carrying a large basket containing bread, for he had been caught loading up the van before going out on delivery. 'What's this you were telling me?' he said to his wife, wrinkling up his face as though he had already forgotten what she had, in great excitement and indignation, been telling him. 'A gipsy woman?' And he looked slowly round the room as though expecting her to be there. By now, of course, the gipsy woman was well away down the lane.

Not seeing the golden flood of hair on the table the baker set his basket squarely on top of it and called for a cup of tea before he went out.

After he had gone Nora thought of the bad luck her hair was going to bring.



Because Father was still out delivering bread at five o'clock Nora and her mother had their tea without him. They ate in a silence broken only by the cries of children at play under the lime trees on the other side of the garden wall. The woman set down her teacup on the table, sat looking at her daughter for a moment and then left the room. Nora heard her walking along the passage overhead and knew that she was going to her bedroom. When she returned she had two one-pound notes in her hand. She gave them to Nora.

'There you are, my girl. I don't want you to get upset by any old gipsy's tales. They ought to be run in for telling such wicked lies. It's all nonsense. Hair in the house never brought

nobody any bad luck. But I know what young girls think about gipsies and I'll not have it playing on your imagination. There! I sold your hair and there's the two pound and that's an end of the matter.'

'Who did you sell it to?' said Nora.

The woman coloured. Her eyes sparkled. 'What's that you say? Well, who'd you think I'd sell it to? The barber, of course. It's out of the house, you understand, it's not under this roof.' She began clattering the crockery on to a tray. 'Anybody would think you didn't believe me.'

There was silence.

'Answer me,' her mother insisted. 'D'you think I'm telling a lie?'

'What'll I do with the money?' If it had not been for the money it would never have occurred to Nora to doubt her mother. But she had never been given so much money all at once before and it made her suspicious. 'I don't take any notice of what gipsies say.'

'D'you think I'm telling you a lie?' her mother shouted.

Nora was startled. Until her mother lost her temper Nora had not doubted her. But now she was quite sure that, for some unknown reason, her mother was lying and the hair was hidden somewhere about the house. 'I don't want the money,' she said and tried to hand the notes back. Her mother would not take them. They were in the middle of their quarrel when Father walked in from the yard. By now Nora was on the point of tears.

Father stood in the doorway holding an empty basket.

Out on the round he frequently picked up a warm good humour that would sometimes last all through the evening. This happened to be just such a time and his eyes were alive. Nora felt that, when he looked at her, he was really seeing her. 'What are you two 'arpies shrieking at?' he said with a note in his voice that might almost have been teasing.

'It's my hair.' Nora turned sulky. 'It's been cut off.'

'What!' Her father set his basket on the ground, took a couple of steps across the kitchen, bent down and seized her

by the shoulders. 'What's that you say?' His voice was pitched high with outrage. 'What the 'ell —' His hand clutched at the nape of her neck, he picked her up in his arms and held her. 'When was this done?' he demanded of his wife. She was alarmed by the tone of hostility.

'The doctor said long hair was giving her headaches. You know very well when it was done. You've got eyes in your head, haven't you?'

'You'd got no damn' call to do anything of the sort.' He was more upset than angry and Nora, still held tightly in his arms, thrilled to the first strong emotion to come anywhere near expressing the loss of her plaits. His anger called up another anger of her own and the impulse that she had, a moment before, to kiss her father, was suddenly transformed into spite.

'Mummy told me a fib.'

'Don't you talk like that to your Ma, you little spitfire.' Father joggled her in his arms.

'She told me she'd sold my plaits and got two pounds for them. She didn't, she didn't, she told a fib.' She found that she was still holding the pound notes in her hand and she threw them on to the floor.

'Here, here, here!' Father was forgetting his own anger in an attempt to console her. 'If they're gone they're gone and we can't have 'em back again. Stop it, d'you hear me!' He gave her leg a slap.

But Nora was not to be so easily shaken out of her fit.

'I don't want them in the house; I don't want to hear of them; I don't want to see them; you can burn them if you like. I don't care.'

Her father set her on her feet with a jolt.

'What've you done with the plaits? Go and get 'em.' In a moment Nora was calm. 'I'll soon put a stop to all this bloody nonsense,' she heard her father saying, and she was stilled by a calm rejoicing that he once more was now the master. His royal temper flared over the room.

When her mother returned with the package of hair he

took it in his hands and showed it to his daughter. 'You see what I've got here? You see what I've got in me 'ands?'

Nora nodded. She was both frightened and proud of her father.

'Now stay 'ere, both of you,' he said and, taking the package with him left the room. They could hear his boots gritting away down the passage, heard him fling open the door of the bakehouse – and after that Nora had to follow him in her imagination. She saw him go over to the firehole and knock the steel door open with the handle of a palette knife. At this time of the day the fire would have burned low, but even so there would be a channel of red coals thrust right to the very back of the oven. And when her father tossed the package on to the coals, for a moment nothing happened. It lay there on the fiery floor as tight as a bun. Then unseen hands appeared to be opening it, folding back the double thickness of paper until the polished tresses themselves lay quietly under the blue incandescence. The newspaper pouted up in vigorous flame and the hair, each strand vibrant with desperate life, began to move. It was indestructible. The fire did not come to it for it was, suddenly, the fire itself, a fine net of gold spun into a heap, flaring from within. And then it had gone.

Nora felt triumphant. She went upstairs, entered her room and flung herself on her bed. An act worthy of her new dignity had been carried out; she felt free and happy.

*

A couple of months later her mother was turning out some drawers when she found the hair, still wrapped in newspaper, thrust under some of her husband's underclothes where he must have pushed it. Like her daughter the woman had assumed that the hair had been destroyed. The sight of it moved her in a way that was quite unexpected. The hair had been hidden away like her husband's love and tenderness. If, almost by accident, she could come across the one was it not reasonable to think that she could come across the other also?

She took the package over to the window and unwrapped it in the sun. The hair sprang up like warmth and joy released and she could not keep back a cry of pleasure at the sight of it. And as she took pleasure in the sight of the hair so she took pleasure in the thought of her daughter. She watched her graceful walk, her womanly poise, her growing self-confidence.

It was as though she, the mother, was standing where the road forked. She was not hesitating which of the roads to follow – she really wished to remain where she was – but the compulsion to continue was strong enough to split her sympathies into two. Under this continual twin recession of her nature she could hardly draw a breath, could not have blown a petal from her lips. She was, at one and the same time, the mother who was no longer young and youth itself, walking from room to room, going up the street and down the street, with smuts of red upon her lips and the short hair curling above her neck.

She thought it strange that it should have been her husband who had shown her that the plaits had gone for ever.

ROBERT PAGAN

A RECENT DISCOVERY

(An old bass-viol was lately bought for a few shillings at a farm sale not a thousand miles from Mellstock. Pasted on the inside of it was the following poem in a well-known handwriting. It is regretted that technical difficulties prevent its reproduction in facsimile. R. P.)

A RIGHT-OF-WAY: 186-

Decades behind me
When courting took more time,
In Tuphampton ewe-leaze I mind me
Two trudging aforetime:
A botanist he, in quest of a sought-after fleabane,
Wheedling his leman with 'Do you love *me*, Jane?'
Yestreen with bowed back
(To hike now is irksome),
Hydroptic and sagging the cloud-wrack,
I spied in the murk some
Wayfarer myopic Linnaeus-wise quizzing the quitches
And snooping at simples and worts in the ditches.

Remarked he, 'A path here
I seek to discover,
A right-of-way bang through this garth here,
Where elsewhiles a lover
I prinked with a pocket herbarium, necked I and cuddled:
Now I'm all mud-besprent, bored and be-puddled.

'I'm long past my noon-time.
The Unweeting Planner
Again proffers bale for one's boon-time
By tossing a spanner
Or crowbar into the works without recking the cost, sir.
At eighty,' intoned he, 'life is a frost, sir.'

'When erst here I tarried
I knew not my steady
Had coolly, concurrently married
Three husbands already,
Nor learnt I till later, what's more, that all three were brothers,
Though sprung they, it seems, of disparate mothers.

'Well, we two inspected
The flora of Wessex;
More specimens had we collected
Had she pondered less sex;
We botanized little that year ... But I must be wending;
My analyst hints at amnesia impending.'



LIONEL TRILLING

OF THIS TIME, OF THAT PLACE

1

It was a fine September day. By noon it would be summer again but now it was true autumn with a touch of chill in the air. As Joseph Howe stood on the porch of the house in which he lodged, ready to leave for his first class of the year, he thought with pleasure of the long indoor days that were coming. It was a moment when he could feel glad of his profession.

On the lawn the peach tree was still in fruit and young Hilda Aiken was taking a picture of it. She held the camera tight against her chest. She wanted the sun behind her but she did not want her own long morning shadow in the foreground. She raised the camera but that did not help, and she lowered it but that made things worse. She twisted her body to the left, then to the right. In the end she had to step out of the direct line of the sun. At last she snapped the shutter and wound the film with intense care.

Howe, watching her from the porch, waited for her to finish and called good morning. She turned, startled, and almost sullenly lowered her glance. In the year Howe had lived at the Aikens', Hilda had accepted him as one of her family, but since his absence of the summer she had grown shy. Then suddenly she lifted her head and smiled at him, and the humorous smile confirmed his pleasure in the day. She picked up her bookbag and set off for school.

The handsome houses on the streets to the college were not yet fully awake but they looked very friendly. Howe went by the Bradby house where he would be a guest this evening at the first dinner-party of the year. When he had gone the length of the picket fence, the whitest in town, he turned back. Along the path there was a fine row of asters

and he went through the gate and picked one for his button-hole. The Bradbys would be pleased if they happened to see him invading their lawn and the knowledge of this made him even more comfortable.

He reached the campus as the hour was striking. The students were hurrying to their classes. He himself was in no hurry. He stopped at his dim cubicle of an office and lit a cigarette. The prospect of facing his class had suddenly presented itself to him and his hands were cold, the lawful seizure of power he was about to make seemed momentous. Waiting did not help. He put out his cigarette, picked up a pad of theme paper and went to his classroom.

As he entered, the rattle of voices ceased and the twenty-odd freshmen settled themselves and looked at him appraisingly. Their faces seemed gross, his heart sank at their massed impassivity, but he spoke briskly.

'My name is Howe,' he said and turned and wrote it on the blackboard. The carelessness of the scrawl confirmed his authority. He went on: 'My office is 412 Slemph Hall and my office hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from eleven-thirty to twelve-thirty.'

He wrote: 'M., W., F., 11.30-12.30.' He said: 'I'll be very glad to see any of you at that time. Or if you can't come then, you can arrange with me for some other time.'

He turned again to the blackboard and spoke over his shoulder. 'The text for the course is Jarman's *Modern Plays*, revised edition. The Co-op has it in stock.' He wrote the name, underlined 'revised edition' and waited for it to be taken down in the new note-books.

When the bent heads were raised again he began his speech of prospectus. 'It is hard to explain —' he said, and paused as they composed themselves. 'It is hard to explain what a course like this is intended to do. We are going to try to learn something about modern literature and something about prose composition.'

As he spoke, his hands warmed and he was able to look directly at the class. Last year on the first day the faces had

seemed just as cloddish, but as the term wore on they became gradually alive and quite likeable. It did not seem possible that the same thing could happen again.

'I shall not lecture in this course,' he continued. 'Our work will be carried on by discussion and we will try to learn by an exchange of opinion. But you will soon recognize that my opinion is worth more than anyone else's here.'

He remained grave as he said it, but two boys understood and laughed. The rest took permission from them and laughed too. All Howe's private ironies protested the vulgarity of the joke but the laughter made him feel benign and powerful.

When the little speech was finished, Howe picked up the pad of paper he had brought. He announced that they would write an extemporaneous theme. Its subject was traditional: 'Who I am and why I came to Dwight College.' By now the class was more at ease and it gave a ritualistic groan of protest. Then there was a stir as fountain-pens were brought out and the writing arms of the chairs were cleared and the paper was passed about. At last all the heads bent to work and the room became still.

Howe sat idly at his desk. The sun shone through the tall clumsy windows. The cool of the morning was already passing. There was a scent of autumn and of varnish, and the stillness of the room was deep and oddly touching. Now and then a student's head was raised and scratched in the old elaborate students' pantomime that calls the teacher to witness honest intellectual effort.

Suddenly a tall boy stood within the frame of the open door. 'Is this,' he said, and thrust a large nose into a college catalogue, 'is this the meeting place of English 1A? The section instructed by Dr Joseph Howe?'

He stood on the very sill of the door, as if refusing to enter until he was perfectly sure of all his rights. The class looked up from work, found him absurd and gave a low mocking cheer.

The teacher and the new student, with equal pointedness, ignored the disturbance. Howe nodded to the boy, who

pushed his head forward and then jerked it back in a wide elaborate arc to clear his brow of a heavy lock of hair. He advanced into the room and halted before Howe, almost at attention. In a loud clear voice he announced: 'I am Tertan, Ferdinand R., reporting at the direction of Head of Department Vincent.'

The heraldic formality of this statement brought forth another cheer. Howe looked at the class with a sternness he could not really feel, for there was indeed something ridiculous about this boy. Under his displeased regard the rows of heads dropped to work again. Then he touched Tertan's elbow, led him up to the desk and stood so as to shield their conversation from the class.

'We are writing an extemporaneous theme,' he said. 'The subject is: "Who I am and why I came to Dwight College".'

He stripped a few sheets from the pad and offered them to the boy. Tertan hesitated and then took the paper, but he held it only tentatively. As if with the effort of making something clear, he gulped, and a slow smile fixed itself on his face. It was at once knowing and shy.

'Professor,' he said, 'to be perfectly fair to my classmates' – he made a large gesture over the room – 'and to you' – he inclined his head to Howe – 'this would not be for me an extemporaneous subject.'

Howe tried to understand. 'You mean you've already thought about it – you've heard we always give the same subject? That doesn't matter.'

Again the boy ducked his head and gulped. It was the gesture of one who wishes to make a difficult explanation with perfect candour. 'Sir,' he said, and made the distinction with great care, 'the topic I did not expect but I have given much ratiocination to the subject.'

Howe smiled and said: 'I don't think that's an unfair advantage. Just go ahead and write.'

Tertan narrowed his eyes and glanced sidewise at Howe. His strange mouth smiled. Then in quizzical acceptance, he

ducked his head, threw back the heavy dank lock, dropped into a seat with a great loose noise and began to write rapidly.

The room fell silent again and Howe resumed his idleness. When the bell rang, the students who had groaned when the task had been set now groaned again because they had not finished. Howe took up the papers and held the class while he made the first assignment. When he dismissed it, Tertan bore down on him, his slack mouth held ready for speech.

'Some professors,' he said, 'are pedants. They are Dryasdusts. However, some professors are free souls and creative spirits. Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche were all professors.' With this pronouncement he paused. 'It is my opinion,' he continued, 'that you occupy the second category.'

Howe looked at the boy in surprise and said with good-natured irony: 'With Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche?'

Not only Tertan's hand and head but his whole awkward body waved away the stupidity. 'It is the kind and not the quantity of the kind,' he said sternly.

Rebuked, Howe said as simply and seriously as he could: 'It would be nice to think so.' He added: 'Of course, I am not a professor.'

This was clearly a disappointment but Tertan met it. 'In the French sense,' he said with composure. 'Generically, a teacher.'

Suddenly he bowed. It was such a bow, Howe fancied, as a stage-director might teach an actor playing a medieval student who takes leave of Abelard – stiff, solemn, with elbows close to the body and feet together. Then, quite as suddenly, he turned and left.

A queer fish, and as soon as Howe reached his office he sifted through the batch of themes and drew out Tertan's. The boy had filled many sheets with his unformed headlong scrawl. 'Who am I?' he had begun. 'Here, in a mundane, not to say commercialized academe, is asked the question which from time long immemorably out of mind has accreted doubts and thoughts in the psyche of man to pester him

as a nuisance. Whether in St Augustine (or Austin as sometimes called) or Miss Bashkirtseff or Frederic Amiel or Empedocles, or in less lights of the intellect than these, this posed question has been ineluctable.'

Howe took out his pencil. He circled 'academe' and wrote 'vocab' in the margin. He underlined 'time long immemorably out of mind' and wrote 'Diction!' But this seemed inadequate for what was wrong. He put down his pencil and read ahead to discover the principle of error in the theme. 'To-day as ever, in spite of gloomy prophets of the dismal science (economics) the question is uninvalidated. Out of the starry depths of heaven hurtles this spear of query demanding to be caught on the shield of the mind ere it pierces the skull and the limbs be unstrung.'

Baffled but quite caught, Howe read on. 'Materialism, by which is meant the philosophic concept and not the moral idea, provides no aegis against the question which lies beyond the tangible (metaphysics). Existence without alloy is the question presented. Environment and heredity relegated aside, the rags and old clothes of practical life discarded, the name and the instrumentality of livelihood do not, as the prophets of the dismal science insist on in this connection, give solution to the interrogation which not from the professor merely but veritably from the cosmos is given. I think, therefore I am (cogito etc.) but who am I? Tertan I am, but what is Tertan? Of this time, of that place, of some parentage, what does it matter?'

Existence without alloy: the phrase established itself. Howe put aside Tertan's paper and at random picked up another. 'I am Arthur J. Casebeer, Jr,' he read. 'My father is Arthur J. Casebeer and my grandfather was Arthur J. Casebeer before him. My mother is Nina Wimple Casebeer. Both of them are college graduates and my father is in insurance. I was born in St Louis eighteen years ago and we still make our residence there.'

Arthur J. Casebeer, who knew who he was, was less interesting than Tertan, but more coherent. Howe picked up

Tertan's paper again. It was clear that none of the routine marginal comments, no 'sent. str.' or 'punct.' or 'vocab.' could cope with this torrential rhetoric. He read ahead, contenting himself with underscoring the errors against the time when he should have the necessary 'conference' with Tertan.

It was a busy and official day of cards and sheets, arrangements and small decisions, and it gave Howe pleasure. Even when it was time to attend the first of the weekly Convocations he felt the charm of the beginning of things when intention is still innocent and uncorrupted by effort. He sat among the young instructors on the platform and joined in their humorous complaints at having to assist at the ceremony, but actually he got a clear satisfaction from the ritual of prayer and prosy speech and even from wearing his academic gown. And when the Convocation was over the pleasure continued as he crossed the campus, exchanging greetings with men he had not seen since the spring. They were people who did not yet, and perhaps never would, mean much to him, but in a year they had grown amiably to be part of his life. They were his fellow-townsmen.

(The day had cooled again at sunset and there was a bright chill in the September twilight. Howe carried his voluminous gown over his arm, he swung his doctoral hood by its purple neckpiece and on his head he wore his mortarboard with its heavy gold tassel bobbing just over his eye. These were the weighty and absurd symbols of his new profession and they pleased him. At twenty-six Joseph Howe had discovered that he was neither so well off nor so Bohemian as he had once thought. A small income, adequate when supplemented by a sizable cash legacy, was genteel poverty when the cash was all spent. And the literary life – the room at the Lafayette or the small apartment without a lease, the long summers on the Cape, the long afternoons and the social evenings – began to weary him. His writing filled his mornings and should perhaps have filled his life, yet it did not. To the amusement of his friends and with a certain sense that he was betraying his own freedom, he had used the last of his

legacy for a year at Harvard. The small but respectable reputation of his two volumes of verse had proved useful – he continued at Harvard on a fellowship and when he emerged as Dr Howe he received an excellent appointment, with prospects, at Dwight.

He had his moments of fear when all that had ever been said of the dangers of the academic life had occurred to him. But after a year in which he had tested every possibility of corruption and seduction he was ready to rest easy. His third volume of verse, most of it written in his first year of teaching, was not only ampler but, he thought, better than its predecessors.

There was a clear hour before the Bradby dinner-party and Howe looked forward to it. But he was not to enjoy it, for lying with his mail on the hall table was a copy of this quarter's issue of *Life and Letters*, to which his landlord subscribed. Its severe cover announced that its editor, Frederic Woolley, had this month contributed an essay called 'Two Poets', and Howe, picking it up, curious to see who the two poets might be, felt his own name start out at him with cabalistic power -- Joseph Howe. As he continued to turn the pages his hand trembled.

Standing in the dark hall, holding the neat little magazine, Howe knew that his literary contempt for Frederic Woolley meant nothing, for he suddenly understood how he respected Woolley in the way of the world. He knew this by the trembling of his hand. And of the little world as well as the great, for although the literary groups of New York might dismiss Woolley, his name carried high authority in the academic world. At Dwight it was even a revered name, for it had been here at the college that Frederic Woolley had made the distinguished scholarly career from which he had gone on to literary journalism. In middle life he had been induced to take the editorship of *Life and Letters*, a literary monthly not widely read but heavily endowed and in its pages he had carried on the defence of what he sometimes called the older values. He was not without wit, he had great knowledge

and considerable taste and even in the full movement of the 'new' literature he had won a certain respect for his refusal to accept it. In France, even in England, he would have been connected with a more robust tradition of conservatism, but America gave him an audience not much better than genteel. It was known in the college that to the subsidy of *Life and Letters* the Bradbys contributed a great part.

As Howe read, he saw that he was involved in nothing less than an event. When the Fifth Series of *Studies in Order and Value* came to be collected, this latest of Frederic Woolley's essays would not be merely another step in the old direction. Clearly and unmistakably, it was a turning-point. All his literary life Woolley had been concerned with the relation of literature to morality, religion, and the private and delicate pieties, and he had been unalterably opposed to all that he had called 'inhuman humanitarianism.' But here, suddenly, dramatically late, he had made an about-face, turning to the public life and to the humanitarian politics he had so long despised. This was the kind of incident the histories of literature make much of. Frederic Woolley was opening for himself a new career and winning a kind of new youth. He contrasted the two poets, Thomas Wormser who was admirable, Joseph Howe who was almost dangerous. He spoke of the 'precious subjectivism' of Howe's verse. 'In times like ours,' he wrote, 'with millions facing penury and want, one feels that the qualities of the *tour d'ivoire* are well-nigh inhuman, nearly insulting. The *tour d'ivoire* becomes the *tour d'ivresse* and it is not self-intoxicated poets that our people need.' The essay said more: 'The problem is one of meaning. I am not ignorant that the creed of the esoteric poets declares that a poem does not and should not *mean* anything, that it *is* something. But poetry is what the poet makes it, and if he is a true poet he makes what his society needs. And what is needed now is the tradition in which Mr Wormser writes, the true tradition of poetry. The Howes do no harm, but they do no good when positive good is demanded of all responsible men. Or do the Howes indeed do no harm? Perhaps

Plato would have said they do, that in some ways theirs is the Phrygian music that turns men's minds from the struggle. Certainly it is true that Thomas Wormser writes in the lucid Dorian mode which sends men into battle with evil.'

It was easy to understand why Woolley had chosen to praise Thomas Wormser. The long, lilting lines of *Corn Under Willows* hymned, as Woolley put it, the struggle for wheat in the Iowa fields and expressed the real lives of real people. But why out of the dozen more notable examples he had chosen Howe's little volume as the example of 'precious subjectivism' was hard to guess. In a way it was funny, this multiplication of himself into 'the Howes'. And yet this becoming the multiform political symbol by whose creation Frederic Woolley gave the sign of a sudden new life, this use of him as a sacrifice whose blood was necessary for the rites of rejuvenation, made him feel oddly unclean.

Nor could Howe get rid of a certain practical resentment. As a poet he had a special and respectable place in the college life. But it might be another thing to be marked as the poet of a wilful and selfish obscurity.

As he walked to the Bradbys Howe was a little tense and defensive. It seemed to him that all the world knew of the 'attack' and agreed with it. And indeed the Bradbys had read the essay, but Professor Bradby, a kind and pretentious man, said, 'I see my old friend knocked you about a bit, my boy', and his wife Eugenia looked at Howe with her child-like blue eyes and said: 'I shall *scold* Frederic for the untrue things he wrote about you. You aren't the least obscure.' They beamed at him. In their genial snobbery they seemed to feel that he had distinguished himself. He was the leader of Howeism. He enjoyed the dinner-party as much as he had thought he would.

And in the following days, as he was more preoccupied with his duties, the incident was forgotten. His classes had ceased to be mere groups. Student after student detached himself from the mass and required or claimed a place in Howe's awareness. Of them all it was Tertan who first and

most violently signalled his separate existence. A week after classes had begun Howe saw his silhouette on the frosted glass of his office door. It was motionless for a long time, perhaps stopped by the problem of whether or not to knock before entering. Howe called, 'Come in!' and Tertan entered with his shambling stride.

He stood beside the desk, silent and at attention. When Howe asked him to sit down, he responded with a gesture of head and hand as if to say that such amenities were beside the point. Nevertheless he did take the chair. He put his ragged crammed brief-case between his legs. His face, which Howe now observed fully for the first time, was confusing, for it was made up of florid curves, the nose arched in the bone and voluted in the nostril, the mouth loose and soft and rather moist. Yet the face was so thin and narrow as to seem the very type of asceticism. Lashes of unusual length veiled the eyes and, indeed, it seemed as if there were a veil over the whole countenance. Before the words actually came, the face screwed itself into an attitude of preparation for them.

'You can confer with me now?' Tertan said.

'Yes, I'd be glad to. There are several things in your two themes I want to talk to you about.' Howe reached for the packet of themes on his desk and sought for Tertan's. But the boy was waving them away.

'These are done perforce,' he said. 'Under the pressure of your requirement. They are not significant, mere duties.' Again his great hand flapped vaguely to dismiss his themes. He leaned forward and gazed at his teacher.

'You are,' he said, 'a man of letters? You are a poet?' It was more declaration than question.

'I should like to think so,' Howe said.

At first Tertan accepted the answer with a show of appreciation, as though the understatement made a secret between himself and Howe. Then he chose to misunderstand. With his shrewd and disconcerting control of expression, he presented to Howe a puzzled grimace. 'What does that mean?' he said.

Howe retracted the irony. 'Yes, I am a poet.' It sounded strange to say.

'That,' Tertan said, 'is a wonder.' He corrected himself with his ducking head. 'I mean that is wonderful.'

Suddenly he dived at the miserable brief-case between his legs, put it on his knees and began to fumble with the catch, all intent on the difficulty it presented. Howe noted that his suit was worn thin, his shirt almost unclean. He became aware, even, of a vague and musty odour of garments worn too long in unaired rooms. Tertan conquered the lock and began to concentrate upon a search into the interior. At last he held in his hand what he was after, a torn and crumpled copy of *Life and Letters*.

'I learned it from here,' he said, holding it out.

Howe looked at him sharply, his hackles a little up. But the boy's face was not only perfectly innocent, it even shone with a conscious admiration. Apparently nothing of the import of the essay had touched him except the wonderful fact that his teacher was a 'man of letters'. Yet this seemed too stupid and Howe, to test it, said: 'The man who wrote that doesn't think it's wonderful.'

Tertan made a moist hissing sound as he cleared his mouth of saliva. His head, oddly loose on his neck, wove a pattern of contempt in the air. 'A critic,' he said, 'who admits *prima facie* that he does not understand.' Then he said grandly: 'It is the inevitable fate.'

It was absurd, yet Howe was not only aware of the absurdity but of a tension suddenly and wonderfully relaxed. Now that the 'attack' was on the table between himself and this strange boy and subject to the boy's funny and absolutely certain contempt, the hidden force of his feeling was revealed to him in the very moment that it vanished. All unsuspected, there had been a film over the world, a transparent but discolouring haze of danger. But he had no time to stop over the brightened aspect of things. Tertan was going on. 'I also am a man of letters. Putative.'

'You have written a good deal?' Howe meant to be no

more than polite and he was surprised at the tenderness he heard in his words.

Solemnly the boy nodded, threw back the dank lock and sucked in a deep anticipatory breath. 'First, a work of homiletics, which is a defence of the principles of religious optimism against the pessimism of Schopenhauer and the humanism of Nietzsche.'

'Humanism? Why do you call it humanism?'

'It is my nomenclature of making a deity of man,' Tertan replied negligently. 'Then three fictional works, novels. And numerous essays in science, combating materialism. Is it your duty to read these if I bring them to you?'

Howe answered simply: 'No, it isn't exactly my duty, but I shall be happy to read them.'

Tertan stood up and remained silent. He rested his bag on the chair. With a certain compunction – for it did not seem entirely proper that, of two men of letters, one should have the right to blue-pencil the other, to grade him or to question the quality of his 'sentence structure' – Howe reached for Tertan's papers. But before he could take them up, the boy suddenly made his bow-to-Abelard, the stiff inclination of the body with the hands seeming to emerge from the scholar's gown. Then he was gone.

But after his departure something was still left of him. The timbre of his curious sentences, the downright finality of so quaint a phrase as 'It is the inevitable fate' still rang in the air. Howe gave the warmth of his feeling to the new visitor who stood at the door announcing himself with a genteel clearing of the throat.

'Dr Howe, I believe?' the student said. A large hand advanced into the room and grasped Howe's hand. 'Blackburn, sir, Theodore Blackburn, vice-president of the Student Council. A great pleasure, sir.'

Out of a pair of ruddy cheeks a pair of small eyes twinkled good-naturedly. The large face, the large body were not so much fat as beefy and suggested something 'typical', monk, politician, or innkeeper.

Blackburn took the seat beside Howe's desk. 'I may have seemed to introduce myself in my public capacity, sir,' he said. 'But it is really as an individual that I came to see you. That is to say, as one of your students to be.'

He spoke with an 'English' intonation and he went on: 'I was once an English major, sir.'

For a moment Howe was startled, for the roast-beef look of the boy and the manner of his speech gave a second's credibility to one sense of his statement. Then the collegiate meaning of the phrase asserted itself, but some perversity made Howe say what was not really in good taste even with so forward a student: 'Indeed? What regiment?'

Blackburn stared and then gave a little pouf-pouf of laughter. He waved the misapprehension away. 'Very good, sir. It certainly is an ambiguous term.' He chuckled in appreciation of Howe's joke, then cleared his throat to put it aside. 'I look forward to taking your course in the romantic poets, sir,' he said earnestly. 'To me the romantic poets are the very crown of English literature.'

Howe made a dry sound, and the boy, catching some meaning in it, said: 'Little as I know them, of course. But even Shakespeare who is so dear to us of the Anglo-Saxon tradition is in a sense but the preparation for Shelley, Keats and Byron. And Wadsworth.'

Almost sorry for him, Howe dropped his eyes. With some embarrassment, for the boy was not actually his student, he said softly: 'Wordsworth.'

'Sir?'

'Wordsworth, not Wadsworth. You said Wadsworth.'

'Did I, sir?' Gravely he shook his head to rebuke himself for the error. 'Wordsworth, of course – slip of the tongue.' Then, quite in command again, he went on. 'I have a favour to ask of you, Dr Howe. You see, I began my college course as an English major' – he smiled – 'as I said.'

'Yes?'

'But after my first year I shifted. I shifted to the social sciences. Sociology and government – I find them stimulating

and very *real*.' He paused, out of respect for reality. 'But now I find that perhaps I have neglected the other side.'

'The other side?' Howe said.

'Imagination, fancy, culture. A well-rounded man.' He trailed off as if there were perfect understanding between them. 'And so, sir, I have decided to end my senior year with your course in the romantic poets.'

His voice was filled with an indulgence which Howe ignored as he said flatly and gravely: 'But that course isn't given until the spring term.'

'Yes, sir, and that is where the favour comes in. Would you let me take your romantic prose course? I can't take it for credit, sir, my programme is full, but just for background it seems to me that I ought to take it. I do hope,' he concluded in a manly way, 'that you will consent.'

'Well, it's no great favour, Mr Blackburn. You can come if you wish, though there's not much point in it if you don't do the reading.'

The bell rang for the hour and Howe got up.

'May I begin with this class, sir?' Blackburn's smile was candid and boyish.

Howe nodded carelessly and together, silently, they walked to the classroom down the hall. When they reached the door Howe stood back to let his student enter, but Blackburn moved adroitly behind him and grasped him by the arm to urge him over the threshold. They entered together with Blackburn's hand firmly on Howe's biceps, the student inducting the teacher into his own room. Howe felt a surge of temper rise in him and almost violently he disengaged his arm and walked to the desk, while Blackburn found a seat in the front row and smiled at him.

2

The question was: At whose door must the tragedy be laid?

All night the snow had fallen heavily and only now was

abating in sparse little flurries. The windows were valanced high with white. It was very quiet, something of the quiet of the world had reached the class and Howe found that everyone was glad to talk or listen. In the room there was a comfortable sense of pleasure in being human.

Casebeer believed that the blame for the tragedy rested with heredity. Picking up the book he read: 'The sins of the fathers are visited on their children.' This opinion was received with general favour. Nevertheless Johnson ventured to say that the fault was all Pastor Manders' because the Pastor had made Mrs Alving go back to her husband and was always hiding the truth. To this Hibbard objected with logic enough: 'Well, then, it was really all her husband's fault. He *did* all the bad things.' De Witt, his face bright with an impatient idea, said that the fault was all society's. 'By society I don't mean upper-crust society,' he said. He looked around a little defiantly, taking in any members of the class who might be members of upper-crust society. 'Not in that sense. I mean the social unit.'

Howe nodded and said: 'Yes, of course.'

'If the society of the time had progressed far enough in science,' De Witt went on, 'then there would be no problem for Mr Ibsen to write about. Captain Alving plays around a little, gives way to perfectly natural biological urges, and he gets a social disease, a venereal disease. If the disease is cured, no problem. Invent salvarsan and the disease is cured. The problem of heredity disappears and li'l Oswald just doesn't get paresis. No paresis, no problem - no problem, no play.'

This was carrying the ark into battle and the class looked at De Witt with respectful curiosity. It was his usual way and on the whole they were sympathetic with his struggle to prove to Howe that science was better than literature. Still, there was something in his reckless manner that alienated them a little.

'Or take birth-control, for instance,' De Witt went on. 'If Mrs Alving had had some knowledge of contraception, she

wouldn't have had to have li'l Oswald at all. No li'l Oswald, no play.'

The class was suddenly quieter. In the back row Stettenhover swung his great football shoulders in a righteous sulking gesture, first to the right, then to the left. He puckered his mouth ostentatiously. Intellect was always ending up by talking dirty.

Tertan's hand went up and Howe said: 'Mr Tertan.' The boy shambled to his feet and began his long characteristic gulp. Howe made a motion with his fingers, as small as possible, and Tertan ducked his head and smiled in apology. He sat down. The class laughed. With more than half the term gone, Tertan had not been able to remember that one did not rise to speak. He seemed unable to carry on the life of the intellect without his mark of respect for it. To Howe the boy's habit of rising seemed to accord with the formal shabbiness of his dress. He never wore the casual sweaters and jackets of his classmates. Into the free and comfortable air of the college classroom he brought the stuffy sordid strictness of some crowded metropolitan high school.

'Speaking from one sense,' Tertan began slowly, 'there is no blame ascribable. From the sense of determinism, who can say where the blame lies? The preordained is the preordained and it cannot be said without rebellion against the universe, a palpable absurdity.'

In the back row Stettenhover slumped suddenly in his seat, his heels held out before him, making a loud dry disgusted sound. His body sank until his neck rested on the back of his chair. He folded his hands across his belly and looked significantly out of the window, exasperated not only with Tertan but with Howe, with the class, with the whole system designed to encourage this kind of thing. There was a certain insolence in the movement and Howe flushed. As Tertan continued to speak, Howe walked casually towards the window and placed himself in the line of Stettenhover's vision. He stared at the great fellow, who pretended not to see him. There was so much power in the big body, so much

contempt in the Greek-athlete face under the crisp Greek-athlete curls, that Howe felt almost physical fear. But at last Stettenhover admitted him to focus and under his disapproving gaze sat up with slow indifference. His eyebrows raised high in resignation, he began to examine his hands. Howe relaxed and turned his attention back to Tertan.

'Flux of existence,' Tertan was saying, 'produces all things, so that judgment wavers. Beyond the phenomena, what? But phenomena are adumbrated and to them we are limited.'

Howe saw it for a moment as perhaps it existed in the boy's mind – the world of shadows which are cast by a great light upon a hidden reality as in the old myth of the Cave. But the little brush with Stettenhover had tired him and he said irritably: 'But come to the point, Mr Tertan.'

He said it so sharply that some of the class looked at him curiously. For three months he had gently carried Tertan through his verbiages, to the vaguely respectful surprise of the other students, who seemed to conceive that there existed between this strange classmate and their teacher some special understanding from which they were content to be excluded. Tertan looked at him mildly and at once came brilliantly to the point. 'This is the summation of the play,' he said and took up his book and read: "'Your poor father never found any outlet for the overmastering joy of life that was in him. And I brought no holiday into his home, either. Everything seemed to turn upon duty and I am afraid I made your poor father's home unbearable to him, Oswald.'" Spoken by Mrs Alving.'

Yes, that was surely the 'summation' of the play and Tertan had hit it, as he hit, deviously and eventually, the literary point of almost everything. But now, as always, he was wrapping it away from sight. 'For most mortals,' he said, 'there are only joys of biological urgings, gross and crass, such as the sensuous Captain Alving. For certain few there are the transmutations beyond these to a contemplation of the utter whole.'

Oh, the boy was mad. And suddenly the word, used in hyperbole, intended almost for the expression of exasperated admiration, became literal. Now that the word was used, it became simply apparent to Howe that Tertan was mad.

It was a monstrous word and stood like a bestial thing in the room. Yet it so completely comprehended everything that had puzzled Howe, it so arranged and explained what for three months had been perplexing him that almost at once its horror became domesticated. With this word Howe was able to understand why he had never been able to communicate to Tertan the value of a single criticism or correction of his wild, verbose themes. Their conferences had been frequent and long but had done nothing to reduce to order the splendid confusion of the boy's ideas. Yet, impossible though its expression was, Tertan's incandescent mind could always strike for a moment into some dark corner of thought.

And now it was suddenly apparent that it was not a faulty rhetoric that Howe had to contend with. With his new knowledge he looked at Tertan's face and wondered how he could have so long deceived himself. Tertan was still talking and the class had lapsed into a kind of patient unconsciousness, a coma of respect for words which, for all that most of them knew, might be profound. Almost with a suffusion of shame, Howe believed that in some dim way the class had long ago had some intimation of Tertan's madness. He reached out as decisively as he could to seize the thread of Tertan's discourse before it should be entangled further.

'Mr Tertan says that the blame must be put upon whoever kills the joy of living in another. We have been assuming that Captain Alving was a wholly bad man, but what if we assume that he became bad only because Mrs Alving, when they were first married, acted towards him in the prudish way she says she did?'

It was a ticklish idea to advance to freshmen and perhaps not profitable. Not all of them were following.

'That would put the blame on Mrs Alving herself, whom most of you admire. And she herself seems to think so.' He

glanced at his watch. The hour was nearly over. 'What do you think, Mr De Witt?'

De Witt rose to the idea, wanted to know if society couldn't be blamed for educating Mrs Alving's temperament in the wrong way. Casebeer was puzzled, Stettenhover continued to look at his hands until the bell rang.

Tertan, his brows louring in thought, was making as always for a private word. Howe gathered his books and papers to leave quickly. At this moment of his discovery and with the knowledge still raw, he could not engage himself with Tertan. Tertan sucked in his breath to prepare for speech and Howe made ready for the pain and confusion. But at that moment Casebeer detached himself from the group with which he had been conferring and which he seemed to represent. His constituency remained at a tactful distance. The mission involved the time of an assigned essay. Casebeer's presentation of the plea – it was based on the freshmen's heavy duties at the fraternities during Carnival Week – cut across Tertan's preparations for speech. 'And so some of us fellows thought,' Casebeer concluded with heavy solemnity, 'that we could do a better job, give our minds to it more, if we had more time.'

Tertan regarded Casebeer with mingled curiosity and revulsion. Howe not only said that he would postpone the assignment but went on to talk about the Carnival and even drew the waiting constituency into the conversation. He was conscious of Tertan's stern and astonished stare, then of his sudden departure.

Now that the fact was clear, Howe knew that he must act on it. His course was simple enough. He must lay the case before the Dean. Yet he hesitated. His feeling for Tertan must now, certainly, be in some way invalidated. Yet could he, because of a word, hurry to assign to official and reasonable solicitude what had been, until this moment, so various and warm? He could at least delay and, by moving slowly, lend a poor grace to the necessary, ugly act of making his report.

It was with some notion of keeping the matter in his own hands that he went to the Dean's office to look up Tertan's records. In the outer office the Dean's secretary greeted him brightly and at his request brought him the manila folder with the small identifying photograph pasted in the corner. She laughed. 'He was looking for the birdie in the wrong place,' she said.

Howe leaned over her shoulder to look at the picture. It was as bad as all the Dean's office photographs were, but it differed from all that Howe had ever seen. Tertan, instead of looking into the camera, as no doubt he had been bidden, had, at the moment of exposure, turned his eyes upward. His mouth, as though conscious of the trick played on the photographer, had the sly superior look that Howe knew.

The secretary was fascinated by the picture. 'What a funny boy,' she said. 'He looks like Tartuffe!'

And so he did, with the absurd piety of the eyes and the conscious slyness of the mouth and the whole face bloated by the bad lens.

'Is he *like* that?' the secretary said.

'Like Tartuffe? No.'

From the photograph there was little enough comfort to be had. The records themselves gave no clue to madness, though they suggested sadness enough. Howe read of a father, Stanislaus Tertan, born in Budapest and trained in engineering in Berlin, once employed by the Hercules Chemical Corporation – this was one of the factories that dominated the south end of the town – but now without employment. He read of a mother Erminie (Youngfellow) Tertan, born in Manchester, educated at a Normal School at Leeds, now housewife by profession. The family lived on Greenbriar Street, which Howe knew as a row of once elegant homes near what was now the factory district. The old mansions had long ago been divided into small and primitive apartments. Of Ferdinand himself there was little to learn. He lived with his parents, had attended a Detroit high school

and had transferred to the local school in his last year. His rating for intelligence, as expressed in numbers, was high, his scholastic record was remarkable, he held a college scholarship for his tuition.

Howe laid the folder on the secretary's desk. 'Did you find what you wanted to know?' she asked.

The phrases from Tertan's momentous first theme came back to him. 'Tertan I am, but what is Tertan? Of this time, of that place, of some parentage, what does it matter?'

'No, I didn't find it,' he said.

Now that he had consulted the sad half-meaningless record he knew all the more firmly that he must not give the matter out of his own hands. He must not release Tertan to authority. Not that he anticipated from the Dean anything but the greatest kindness for Tertan. The Dean would have the experience and skill which he himself could not have. One way or another the Dean could answer the question: 'What is Tertan?' Yet this was precisely what he feared. He alone could keep alive – not for ever but for a somehow important time – the question: 'What is Tertan?' He alone could keep it still a question. Some sure instinct told him that he must not surrender the question to a clean official desk in a clear official light to be dealt with, settled and closed.

He heard himself saying: 'Is the Dean busy at the moment? I'd like to see him.'

His request came thus unbidden, even forbidden, and it was one of the surprising and startling incidents of his life. Later, when he reviewed the events, so disconnected in themselves or so merely odd, of the story that unfolded for him that year, it was over this moment, on its face the least notable, that he paused longest. It was frequently to be with fear and never without a certainty of its meaning in his own knowledge of himself that he would recall this simple, routine request and the feeling of shame and freedom it gave him as he sent everything down the official chute. In the end, of course, no matter what he did to 'protect' Tertan, he

would have had to make the same request and lay the matter on the Dean's clean desk. But it would always be a landmark of his life that, at the very moment when he was rejecting the official way, he had been, without will or intention, so gladly drawn to it.

After the storm's last delicate flurry, the sun had come out. Reflected by the new snow, it filled the office with a golden light which was almost musical in the way it made all the commonplace objects of efficiency shine with a sudden sad and noble significance. And the light, now that he noticed it, made the utterance of his perverse and unwanted request even more momentous.

The secretary consulted the engagement pad. 'He'll be free any minute. Don't you want to wait in the parlour?'

She threw open the door of the large and pleasant room in which the Dean held his Committee meetings and in which his visitors waited. It was designed with a homely elegance on the masculine side of the eighteenth-century manner. There was a small coal fire in the grate and the handsome mahogany table was strewn with books and magazines. The large windows gave on the snowy lawn and there was such a fine width of window that the white casements and walls seemed at this moment but a continuation of the snow, the snow but an extension of casement and walls. The outdoors seemed taken in and made safe, the indoors seemed luxuriously freshened and expanded.

Howe sat down by the fire and lighted a cigarette. The room had its intended effect upon him. He felt comfortable and relaxed, yet nicely organized, some young diplomatic agent of the eighteenth century, the newly fledged Swift carrying out Sir William Temple's business. The rawness of Tertan's case quite vanished. He crossed his legs and reached for a magazine.

It was that famous issue of *Life and Letters* that his idle hand had found and his blood raced as he sifted through it and the shape of his own name, Joseph Howe, sprang out at him, still cabalistic in its power. He tossed the magazine

back on the table as the door of the Dean's office opened and the Dean ushered out Theodore Blackburn.

'Ah, Joseph!' the Dean said.

Blackburn said: 'Good morning, Doctor.' Howe winced at the title and caught the flicker of amusement over the Dean's face. The Dean stood with his hand high on the door-jamb and Blackburn, still in the doorway, remained standing almost under his long arm.

Howe nodded briefly to Blackburn, snubbing his eager deference. 'Can you give me a few minutes?' he said to the Dean.

'All the time you want. Come in.' Before the two men could enter the office, Blackburn claimed their attention with a long full 'Er'. As they turned to him, Blackburn said: 'Can you give *me* a few minutes, Dr Howe?' His eyes sparkled at the little audacity he had committed, the slightly impudent play with hierarchy. Of the three of them Blackburn kept himself the lowest, but he reminded Howe of his subaltern relation to the Dean.

'I mean, of course,' Blackburn went on easily, 'when you've finished with the Dean.'

'I'll be in my office shortly,' Howe said, turned his back on the ready 'Thank you, sir', and followed the Dean into the inner room.

'Energetic boy,' said the Dean. 'A bit beyond himself but very energetic. Sit down.'

The Dean lighted a cigarette, leaned back in his chair, sat easy and silent for a moment, giving Howe no signal to go ahead with business. He was a young Dean, not much beyond forty, a tall handsome man with sad, ambitious eyes. He had been a Rhodes scholar. His friends looked for great things from him and it was generally said that he had notions of education which he was not yet ready to try to put into practice.

His relaxed silence was meant as a compliment to Howe. He smiled and said: 'What's the business, Joseph?'

'Do you know Tertan - Ferdinand Tertan, a freshman?'

The Dean's cigarette was in his mouth and his hands were clasped behind his head. He did not seem to search his memory for the name. He said: 'What about him?'

Clearly the Dean knew something and he was waiting for Howe to tell him more. Howe moved only tentatively. Now that he was doing what he had resolved not to do, he felt more guilty at having been so long deceived by Tertan and more need to be loyal to his error.

'He's a strange fellow,' he ventured. He said stubbornly: 'In a strange way he's very brilliant.' He concluded: 'But very strange.'

The springs of the Dean's swivel chair creaked as he came out of his sprawl and leaned forward to Howe. 'Do you mean he's so strange that it's something you could give a name to?'

Howe looked at him stupidly. 'What do you mean?' he said.

'What's his trouble?' the Dean said more neutrally.

'He's very brilliant, in a way. I looked him up and he has a top intelligence rating. But somehow, and it's hard to explain just how, what he says is always on the edge of sense and doesn't quite make it.'

The Dean looked at him and Howe flushed up. The Dean had surely read Woolley on the subject of 'the Howes' and the *tour d'ivresse*. Was that quick glance ironical?

The Dean picked up some papers from his desk and Howe could see that they were in Tertan's impatient scrawl. Perhaps the little gleam in the Dean's glance had come only from putting facts together.

'He sent me this yesterday,' the Dean said. 'After an interview I had with him. I haven't been able to do more than glance at it. When you said what you did, I realized there was something wrong.'

Twisting his mouth, the Dean looked over the letter. 'You seem to be involved,' he said without looking up. 'By the way, what did you give him at mid-term?'

Flushing, setting his shoulders, Howe said firmly: 'I gave him A-minus.'

The Dean chuckled. 'Might be a good idea if some of our nicer boys went crazy — just a little.' He said, 'Well,' to conclude the matter and handed the papers to Howe. 'See if this is the same thing you've been finding. Then we can go into the matter again.'

Before the fire in the parlour, in the chair that Howe had been occupying, sat Blackburn. He sprang to his feet as Howe entered.

'I said my office, Mr Blackburn.' Howe's voice was sharp. Then he was almost sorry for the rebuke, so clearly and naïvely did Blackburn seem to relish his stay in the parlour, close to authority.

'I'm in a bit of a hurry, sir,' he said, 'and I did want to be sure to speak to you, sir.'

He was really absurd, yet fifteen years from now he would have grown up to himself, to the assurance and mature beefiness. In banks, in consular offices, in brokerage firms, on the bench, more seriously affable, a little sterner, he would make use of his ability to be administered by his job. It was almost reassuring. Now he was exercising his too-great skill on Howe. 'I owe you an apology, sir,' he said.

Howe knew that he did but he showed surprise.

'I mean, Doctor, after your having been so kind about letting me attend your class, I stopped coming.' He smiled in deprecation. 'Extra-curricular activities take up so much of my time. I'm afraid I undertook more than I could perform.'

Howe had noticed the absence and had been a little irritated by it after Blackburn's elaborate plea. It was an absence that might be interpreted as a comment on the teacher. But there was only one way for him to answer. 'You've no need to apologize,' he said. 'It's wholly your affair.'

Blackburn beamed. 'I'm so glad you feel that way about it, sir. I was worried you might think I had stayed away because I was influenced by —' He stopped and lowered his eyes.

Astonished, Howe said: 'Influenced by what?'

'Well, by —' Blackburn hesitated and for answer pointed

to the table on which lay the copy of *Life and Letters*. Without looking at it, he knew where to direct his hand. 'By the unfavourable publicity, sir.' He hurried on. 'And that brings me to another point, sir. I am secretary of Quill and Scroll, sir, the student literary society, and I wonder if you would address us. You could read your own poetry, sir, and defend your own point of view. It would be very interesting.'

It was truly amazing. Howe looked long and cruelly into Blackburn's face, trying to catch the secret of the mind that could have conceived this way of manipulating him, this way so daring and inept – but not entirely inept – with its malice so without malignity. The face did not yield its secret. Howe smiled broadly and said: 'Of course I don't think you were influenced by the unfavourable publicity.'

'I'm still going to take – regularly, for credit – your romantic poets course next term,' Blackburn said.

'Don't worry, my dear fellow, don't worry about it.'

Howe started to leave and Blackburn stopped him with: 'But about Quill, sir?'

'Suppose we wait until next term? I'll be less busy then.'

And Blackburn said: 'Very good, sir, and thank you.'

In his office the little encounter seemed less funny to Howe, was even in some indeterminate way disturbing. He made an effort to put it from his mind by turning to what was sure to disturb him more, the Tertan letter read in the new interpretation. He found what he had always found, the same florid leaps beyond fact and meaning, the same headlong certainty. But as his eye passed over the familiar scrawl it caught his own name and for the second time that hour he felt the race of his blood.

'The Paraclete,' Tertan had written to the Dean, 'from a Greek word meaning to stand in place of, but going beyond the primitive idea to mean traditionally the helper, the one who comforts and assists, cannot without fundamental loss be jettisoned. Even if taken no longer in the supernatural sense, the concept remains deeply in the human consciousness inevitably. Humanitarianism is no reply, for not every

man stands in the place of every other man for this other's comrade comfort. But certain are chosen out of the human race to be the consoler of some other. Of these, for example, is Joseph Barker Howe, Ph.D. Of intellects not the first yet of true intellect and lambent instructions, given to that which is intuitive and irrational, not to what is logical in the strict word, what is judged by him is of the heart and not the head. Here is one chosen, in that he chooses himself to stand in the place of another for comfort and consolation. To him more than another I give my gratitude, with all respect to our Dean who reads this, a noble man, but merely dedicated, not consecrated. But not in the aspect of the Paraclete only is Dr Joseph Barker Howe established, for he must be the Paraclete to another aspect of himself, that which is driven and persecuted by the lack of understanding in the world at large, so that he in himself embodies the full history of man's tribulations and, overflowing upon others, notably the present writer, is the ultimate end.'

This was love. There was no escape from it. Try as Howe might to remember that Tertan was mad and all his emotions invalidated, he could not destroy the effect upon him of his student's stern, affectionate regard. He had betrayed not only a power of mind but a power of love. And however firmly he held before his attention the fact of Tertan's madness, he could do nothing to banish the physical sensation of gratitude he felt. He had never thought of himself as 'driven and persecuted' and he did not now. But still he could not make meaningless his sensation of gratitude. The pitiable Tertan sternly pitied him, and comfort came from Tertan's never-to-be-comforted mind.

3

In an academic community, even an efficient one, official matters move slowly. The term drew to a close with no action in the case of Tertan, and Joseph Howe had to confront a curious problem. How should he grade his strange student, Tertan?

Tertan's final examination had been no different from all his other writing, and what did one 'give' such a student? De Witt must have his A, that was clear. Johnson would get a B. With Casebeer it was a question of a B-minus or a C-plus, and Stettenhover, who had been crammed by the team tutor to fill half a blue-book with his thin feminine scrawl, would have his C-minus which he would accept with mingled indifference and resentment. But with Tertan it was not so easy.

The boy was still in the college process and his name could not be omitted from the grade sheet. Yet what should a mind under suspicion of madness be graded? Until the medical verdict was given, it was for Howe to continue as Tertan's teacher and to keep his judgment pedagogical. Impossible to give him an F: he had not failed. B was for Johnson's stolid mediocrity. He could not be put on the edge of passing with Stettenhover, for he exactly did not pass. In energy and richness of intellect he was perhaps even De Witt's superior, and Howe toyed grimly with the notion of giving him an A, but that would lower the value of the A De Witt had won with his beautiful and clear, if still arrogant, mind. There was a notation which the Registrar recognized – Inc for Incomplete and in the horrible comedy of the situation, Howe considered that. But really only a mark of M for Mad would serve.

In his perplexity, Howe sought the Dean, but the Dean was out of town. In the end, he decided to maintain the A-minus he had given Tertan at mid-term. After all, there had been no falling away from that quality. He entered it on the grade sheet with something like bravado.

Academic time moves quickly. A college year is not really a year, lacking as it does three months. And it is endlessly divided into units which, at their beginning, appear larger than they are – terms, half-terms, months, weeks. And the ultimate unit, the hour, is not really an hour, lacking as it does ten minutes. And so the new term advanced rapidly and one day the fields about the town were all brown, cleared

of even the few thin patches of snow which had lingered so long.

Howe, as he lectured on the romantic poets, became conscious of Blackburn emanating wrath. Blackburn did it well, did it with enormous dignity. He did not stir in his seat, he kept his eyes fixed on Howe in perfect attention, but he abstained from using his note-book, there was no mistaking what he proposed to himself as an attitude. His elbow on the writing-wing of the chair, his chin on the curled fingers of his hand, he was the embodiment of intellectual indignation. He was thinking his own thoughts, would give no public offence, yet would claim his due, was not to be intimidated. Howe knew that he would present himself at the end of the hour.

Blackburn entered the office without invitation. He did not smile, there was no cajolery about him. Without invitation he sat down beside Howe's desk. He did not speak until he had taken the blue-book from his pocket. He said: 'What does this mean, sir?'

It was a sound and conservative student tactic. Said in the usual way it meant: 'How could you have so misunderstood me?' or 'What does this mean for my future in the course?' But there were none of the humbler tones in Blackburn's way of saying it.

Howe made the established reply: 'I think that's for you to tell me.'

Blackburn continued icy. 'I'm sure I can't, sir.'

There was a silence between them. Both dropped their eyes to the blue-book on the desk. On its cover Howe had penciled: 'F. This is very poor work.'

Howe picked up the blue-book. There was always the possibility of injustice. The teacher may be bored by the mass of papers and not wholly attentive. A phrase, even the student's handwriting, may irritate him unreasonably. 'Well,' said Howe, 'let's go through it.'

He opened the first page. 'Now here: you write: "In the *Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge lives in and transports us to a

honey-sweet world where all is rich and strange, a world of charm to which we can escape from the humdrum existence of our daily lives, the world of romance. Here, in this warm and honey-sweet land of charming dreams we can relax and enjoy ourselves”.

Howe lowered the paper and waited with a neutral look for Blackburn to speak. Blackburn returned the look boldly, did not speak, sat stolid and lofty. At last Howe said, speaking gently: ‘Did you mean that, or were you just at a loss for something to say?’

‘You imply that I was just “bluffing”?’ The quotation marks hung palpable in the air about the word.

‘I’d like to know. I’d prefer believing that you were bluffing to believing that you really thought this.’

Blackburn’s eyebrows went up. From the height of a great and firm-based idea he looked at his teacher. He clasped the crags for a moment and then pounced, craftily, suavely. ‘Do you mean, Dr Howe, that there aren’t two opinions possible?’

It was superbly done in its air of putting all of Howe’s intellectual life into the balance. Howe remained patient and simple. ‘Yes, many opinions are possible, but not this one. Whatever anyone believes of the *Ancient Mariner*, no one can in reason believe that it represents a – a honey-sweet world in which we can relax.’

‘But that is what I *feel*, sir.’

This was well done too. Howe said: ‘Look, Mr Blackburn. Do you really relax with hunger and thirst, the heat and the sea-serpents, the dead men with staring eyes, Life in Death and the skeletons? Come now, Mr Blackburn.’

Blackburn made no answer and Howe pressed forward. ‘Now you say of Wordsworth: “Of peasant stock himself, he turned from the effete life of the salons and found in the peasant the hope of a flaming revolution which would sweep away all the old ideas. This is the subject of his best poems”.’

Beaming at his teacher with youthful eagerness, Blackburn

said: 'Yes, sir, a rebel, a bringer of light to suffering mankind. I see him as a kind of Prothemeus.'

'A kind of what?'

'Prothemeus, sir.'

'Think, Mr Blackburn. We were talking about him only to-day and I mentioned his name a dozen times. You don't mean Prothemeus. You mean —' Howe waited but there was no response.

'You mean Prometheus.'

Blackburn gave no assent and Howe took the reins. 'You've done a bad job here, Mr Blackburn, about as bad as could be done.' He saw Blackburn stiffen and his genial face harden again. 'It shows either a lack of preparation or a complete lack of understanding.' He saw Blackburn's face begin to go to pieces and he stopped.

'Oh, sir,' Blackburn burst out, 'I've never had a mark like this before, never anything below a B, never. A thing like this has never happened to me before.'

It must be true, it was a statement too easily verified. Could it be that other instructors accepted such flaunting nonsense? Howe wanted to end the interview. 'I'll set it down to lack of preparation,' he said. 'I know you're busy. That's not an excuse but it's an explanation. Now suppose you really prepare and then take another quiz in two weeks. We'll forget this one and count the other.'

Blackburn squirmed with pleasure and gratitude. 'Thank you, sir. You're really very kind, very kind.'

Howe rose to conclude the visit. 'All right then — in two weeks.'

It was that day that the Dean imparted to Howe the conclusion of the case of Tertan. It was simple and a little anticlimatic. A physician had been called in, and had said the word, given the name.

'A classic case, he called it,' the Dean said. 'Not a doubt in the world,' he said. His eyes were full of miserable pity and he clutched at a word. 'A classic case, a classic case.' To his aid and to Howe's there came the Parthenon and the form

of the Greek drama, the Aristotelian logic, Racine and the Well-Tempered Clavichord, the blueness of the Aegean and its clear sky. Classic – that is to say, without a doubt, perfect in its way, a veritable model, and, as the Dean had been told, sure to take a perfectly predictable and inevitable course to a foreknown conclusion.

It was not only pity that stood in the Dean's eyes. For a moment there was fear too. 'Terrible,' he said, 'it is simply terrible.'

Then he went on briskly. 'Naturally we've told the boy nothing. And naturally we won't. His tuition's paid by his scholarship and we'll continue him on the rolls until the end of the year. That will be kindest. After that the matter will be out of our control. We'll see, of course, that he gets into the proper hands. I'm told there will be no change, he'll go on like this, be as good as this, for four to six months. And so we'll just go along as usual.'

So Tertan continued to sit in Section 5 of English 1A, to his classmates still a figure of curiously dignified fun, symbol to most of them of the respectable but absurd intellectual life. But to his teacher he was now very different. He had not changed – he was still the greyhound casting for the scent of ideas and Howe could see that he was still the same Tertan, but he could not feel it. What he felt as he looked at the boy sitting in his accustomed place was the hard blank of a fact. The fact itself was formidable and depressing. But what Howe was chiefly aware of was that he had permitted the metamorphosis of Tertan from person to fact.

As much as possible he avoided seeing Tertan's upraised hand and eager eye. But the fact did not know of its mere factuality, it continued its existence as if it were Tertan, hand up and eye questioning, and one day it appeared in Howe's office with a document.

'Even the spirit who lives egregiously, above the herd, must have its relations with the fellow-man,' Tertan declared. He laid the document on Howe's desk. It was headed 'Quill

and Scroll Society of Dwight College. Application for Membership'.

'In most ways these are crass minds,' Tertan said, touching the paper. 'Yet as a whole, bound together in their common love of letters, they transcend their intellectual lacks, since it is not a paradox that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.'

'When are the elections?' Howe asked.

'They take place to-morrow.'

'I certainly hope you will be successful.'

'Thank you. Would you wish to implement that hope?' A rather dirty finger pointed to the bottom of the sheet. 'A faculty recommender is necessary,' Tertan said stiffly, and waited.

'And you wish me to recommend you?'

'It would be an honour.'

'You may use my name.'

Tertan's finger pointed again. 'It must be a written sponsorship, signed by the sponsor.' There was a large blank space on the form under the heading: 'Opinion of Faculty Sponsor.'

This was almost another thing and Howe hesitated. Yet there was nothing else to do and he took out his fountain-pen. He wrote: 'Mr Ferdinand Tertan is marked by his intense devotion to letters and by his exceptional love of all things of the mind.' To this he signed his name which looked bold and assertive on the white page. It disturbed him, the strange affirming power of a name. With a business-like air, Tertan whipped up the paper, folded it with decision and put it into his pocket. He bowed and took his departure, leaving Howe with the sense of having done something oddly momentous.

And so much now seemed odd and momentous to Howe that should not have seemed so. It was odd and momentous, he felt, when he sat with Blackburn's second quiz before him and wrote in an excessively firm hand the grade of C-minus. The paper was a clear, an indisputable failure. He

was carefully and consciously committing a cowardice. Blackburn had told the truth when he had pleaded his past record. Howe had consulted it in the Dean's office. It showed no grade lower than a B-minus. A canvass of some of Blackburn's previous instructors had brought vague attestations to the adequate powers of a student imperfectly remembered and sometimes surprise that his abilities could be questioned at all.

As he wrote the grade, Howe told himself that this cowardice sprang from an unwillingness to have more dealings with a student he disliked. He knew it was simpler than that. He knew he feared Blackburn: that was the absurd truth. And cowardice did not solve the matter after all. Blackburn, flushed with a first success, attacked at once. The minimal passing grade had not assuaged his feelings, and he sat at Howe's desk and again the blue-book lay between them. Blackburn said nothing. With an enormous impudence, he was waiting for Howe to speak and explain himself.

At last Howe said sharply and rudely: 'Well?' His throat was tense and the blood was hammering in his head. His mouth was tight with anger at himself for his disturbance.

Blackburn's glance was almost baleful. 'This is impossible, sir.'

'But there it is,' Howe answered.

'Sir?' Blackburn had not caught the meaning but his tone was still haughty.

Impatiently Howe said: 'There it is, plain as day. Are you here to complain again?'

'Indeed I am, sir.' There was surprise in Blackburn's voice that Howe should ask the question.

'I shouldn't complain if I were you. You did a thoroughly bad job on your first quiz. This one is a little, only a very little, better.' This was not true. If anything, it was worse.

'That might be a matter of opinion, sir.'

'It is a matter of opinion. Of my opinion.'

'Another opinion might be different, sir.'

'You really believe that?' Howe said.

'Yes.' The omission of the 'sir' was monumental.

'Whose, for example?'

'The Dean's, for example.' Then the fleshy jaw came forward a little. 'Or a certain literary critic's, for example.'

It was colossal and almost too much for Blackburn himself to handle. The solidity of his face almost crumpled under it. But he withstood his own audacity and went on. 'And the Dean's opinion might be guided by the knowledge that the person who gave me this mark is the man whom a famous critic, the most eminent judge of literature in this country, called a drunken man. The Dean might think twice about whether such a man is fit to teach Dwight students.'

Howe said in quiet admonition, 'Blackburn, you're mad', meaning no more than to check the boy's extravagance.

But Blackburn paid no heed. He had another shot in the locker. 'And the Dean might be guided by the information, of which I have evidence, documentary evidence' – he slapped his breast-pocket twice – 'that this same person personally recommended to the college literary society, the oldest in the country, that he personally recommended a student who is crazy, who threw the meeting into an uproar, a psychiatric case. The Dean might take that into account.'

Howe was never to learn the details of that 'uproar'. He had always to content himself with the dim but passionate picture which at that moment sprang into his mind, of Tertan standing on some abstract height and madly denouncing the multitude of Quill and Scroll who howled him down.

He sat quiet a moment and looked at Blackburn. The ferocity had entirely gone from the student's face. He sat regarding his teacher almost benevolently. He had played a good card and now, scarcely at all unfriendly, he was waiting to see the effect. Howe took up the blue-book and negligently sifted through it. He read a page, closed the book, struck out the C-minus and wrote an F.

'Now you may take the paper to the Dean,' he said.

'You may tell him that after reconsidering it, I lowered the grade.'

The gasp was audible. 'Oh, sir!' Blackburn cried. 'Please!' His face was agonized. 'It means my graduation, my livelihood, my future. Don't do this to me.'

'It's done already.'

Blackburn stood up. 'I spoke rashly, sir, hastily. I had no intention, no real intention, of seeing the Dean. It rests with you—entirely, entirely. I *hope* you will restore the first mark.'

'Take the matter to the Dean or not, just as you choose. The grade is what you deserve and it stands.'

Blackburn's head dropped. 'And will I be failed at mid-term, sir?'

'Of course.'

From deep out of Blackburn's great chest rose a cry of anguish. 'Oh, sir, if you want me to go down on my knees to you, I will, I will.'

Howe looked at him in amazement.

'I will, I will. On my knees, sir. This mustn't, mustn't happen.'

He spoke so literally, meaning so very truly that his knees and exactly his knees were involved and seeming to think that he was offering something of tangible value to his teacher, that Howe, whose head had become icy clear in the nonsensical drama, thought, 'The boy is mad', and began to speculate fantastically whether something in himself attracted or developed aberration. He could see himself standing absurdly before the Dean and saying: 'I've found another. This time it's the vice-president of the Council, the manager of the debating team, and secretary of Quill and Scroll.'

One more such discovery, he thought, and he himself would be discovered! And there, suddenly, Blackburn was on his knees with a thump, his huge thighs straining his trousers, his hands outstretched in a great gesture of supplication.

With a cry, Howe shoved back his swivel chair and it

rolled away on its casters half across the little room. Blackburn knelt for a moment to nothing at all, then got to his feet.

Howe rose abruptly. He said: 'Blackburn, you will stop acting like an idiot. Dust your knees off, take your paper and get out. You've behaved like a fool and a malicious person. You have half a term to do a decent job. Keep your silly mouth shut and try to do it. Now get out.'

Blackburn's head was low. He raised it and there was a pious light in his eyes. 'Will you shake hands, sir?' he said. He thrust out his hand.

'I will not,' Howe said.

Head and hand sank together. Blackburn picked up his blue-book and walked to the door. He turned and said: 'Thank you, sir.' His back, as he departed, was heavy with tragedy and stateliness.

4

After years of bad luck with the weather, the college had a perfect day for commencement. It was wonderfully bright, the air so transparent, the wind so brisk that no one could resist talking about it.

As Howe set out for the campus he heard Hilda calling from the backyard. She called, 'Professor, professor', and came running to him.

Howe said: 'What's this "professor" business?'

'Mother told me,' Hilda said. 'You've been promoted. And I want to take your picture.'

'Next year,' said Howe. 'I won't be a professor until next year. And you know better than to call anybody "professor".'

'It was just in fun,' Hilda said. She seemed disappointed.

'But you can take my picture if you want. I won't look much different next year.' Still, it was frightening. It might mean that he was to stay in this town all his life.

Hilda brightened. 'Can I take it in this?' she said, and touched the gown he carried over his arm.

Howe laughed. 'Yes, you can take it in this.'

'I'll get my things and meet you in front of Otis,' Hilda said. 'I have the background all picked out.'

On the campus the Commencement crowd was already large. It stood about in eager, nervous little family groups. As he crossed, Howe was greeted by a student, capped and gowned, glad of the chance to make an event for his parents by introducing one of his teachers. It was while Howe stood there chatting that he saw Tertan.

He had never seen anyone quite so alone, as though a circle had been woven about him to separate him from the gay crowd on the campus. Not that Tertan was not gay – he was the gayest of all. Three weeks had passed since Howe had last seen him, the weeks of examination, the lazy week before Commencement, and this was now a different Tertan. On his head he wore a panama hat, broad-brimmed and fine, of the shape associated with South American planters. He wore a suit of raw silk, luxurious but yellowed with age and much too tight, and he sported a whangee cane. He walked sedately, the hat tilted at a devastating angle, the stick coming up and down in time to his measured tread. He had, Howe guessed, outfitted himself to greet the day in the clothes of that ruined father whose existence was on record in the Dean's office. Gravely and arrogantly he surveyed the scene – in it, his whole bearing seemed to say, but not of it. With his haughty step, with his flashing eye, Tertan was coming nearer. Howe did not wish to be seen. He shifted his position slightly. When he looked again, Tertan was not in sight.

The chapel clock struck the quarter hour. Howe detached himself from his chat and hurried to Otis Hall at the far end of the campus. Hilda had not yet come. He went up into the high portico and, using the glass of the door for a mirror, put on his gown, adjusted the hood on his shoulders and set the mortar-board on his head. When he came down the steps Hilda had arrived.

Nothing could have told him more forcibly that a year had

passed than the development of Hilda's photographic possessions from the box camera of the previous fall. By a strap about her neck was hung a leather case, so thick and strong, so carefully stitched and so moulded to its contents that it could only hold a costly camera. The appearance was deceptive, Howe knew, for he had been present at the Aikens' pre-Christmas conference about its purchase. It was only a fairly good domestic camera. Still, it looked very impressive. Hilda carried another leather case from which she drew a collapsible tripod. Decisively she extended each of its gleaming legs and set it up on the path. She removed the camera from its case and fixed it to the tripod. In its compact efficiency the camera almost had a life of its own, but Hilda treated it with easy familiarity, looked into its eye, glanced casually at its gauges. Then from a pocket she took still another leather case and drew from it a small instrument through which she looked first at Howe, who began to feel inanimate and lost, and then at the sky. She made some adjustment on the instrument, then some adjustment on the camera. She swept the scene with her eye, found a spot and pointed the camera in its direction. She walked to the spot, stood on it and beckoned to Howe. With each new leather case, with each new instrument and with each new adjustment she had grown in ease and now she said: 'Joe, will you stand here?'

Obediently Howe stood where he was bidden. She had yet another instrument. She took out a tape-measure on a mechanical spool. Kneeling down before Howe, she put the little metal ring of the tape under the tip of his shoe. At her request, Howe pressed it with his toe. When she had measured her distance, she nodded to Howe who released the tape. At a touch, it sprang back into the spool. 'You have to be careful if you're going to get what you want,' Hilda said. 'I don't believe in all this snap-snap-snapping,' she remarked loftily. Howe nodded in agreement, although he was beginning to think Hilda's care excessive.

Now at last the moment had come. Hilda squinted into

the camera, moved the tripod slightly. She stood to the side, holding the plunger of the shutter-cable. 'Ready,' she said. 'Will you relax, Joseph, please?' Howe realized that he was standing frozen. Hilda stood poised and precise as a setter, one hand holding the little cable, the other extended with curled dainty fingers like a dancer's, as if expressing to her subject the precarious delicacy of the moment. She pressed the plunger and there was the click. At once she stirred to action, got behind the camera, turned a new exposure. 'Thank you,' she said. 'Would you stand under that tree and let me do a character study with light and shade?'

The childish absurdity of the remark restored Howe's ease. He went to the little tree. The pattern the leaves made on his gown was what Hilda was after. He had just taken a satisfactory position when he heard in the unmistakable voice: 'Ah, Doctor! Having your picture taken?'

Howe gave up the pose and turned to Blackburn who stood on the walk, his hands behind his back, a little too large for his bachelor's gown. Annoyed that Blackburn should see him posing for a character study in light and shade, Howe said irritably: 'Yes, having my picture taken.'

Blackburn beamed at Hilda. 'And the little photographer,' he said. Hilda fixed her eyes on the ground and stood closer to her brilliant and aggressive camera. Blackburn, teetering on his heels, his hands behind his back, wholly prelatiical and benignly patient, was not abashed at the silence. At last Howe said: 'If you'll excuse us, Mr Blackburn, we'll go on with the picture.'

'Go right ahead, sir. I'm running along.' But he only came closer. 'Dr Howe,' he said fervently, 'I want to tell you how glad I am that I was able to satisfy your standards at last.'

Howe was surprised at the hard insulting brightness of his own voice and even Hilda looked up curiously as he said: 'Nothing you have ever done has satisfied me and nothing you could ever do would satisfy me, Blackburn.'

With a glance at Hilda, Blackburn made a gesture as if to hush Howe—as though all his former bold malice had taken for granted a kind of understanding between himself and his teacher, a secret which must not be betrayed to a third person. ‘I only meant, sir,’ he said, ‘that I was able to pass your course after all.’

Howe said: ‘You didn’t pass my course. I passed you out of my course. I passed you without even reading your paper. I wanted to be sure the college would be rid of you. And when all the grades were in and I did read your paper, I saw I was right not to have read it first.’

Blackburn presented a stricken face. ‘It was very bad, sir?’

But Howe had turned away. The paper had been fantastic. The paper had been, if he wished to see it so, mad. It was at this moment that the Dean came up behind Howe and caught his arm. ‘Hello, Joseph,’ he said. ‘We’d better be getting along, it’s almost late.’

He was not a familiar man, but when he saw Blackburn, who approached to greet him, he took Blackburn’s arm too. ‘Hello, Theodore,’ he said. Leaning forward on Howe’s arm and on Blackburn’s, he said: ‘Hello, Hilda dear.’ Hilda replied quietly: ‘Hello, Uncle George.’

Still clinging to their arms, still linking Howe and Blackburn, the Dean said: ‘Another year gone, Joe, and we’ve turned out another crop. After you’ve been here a few years, you’ll find it reasonably upsetting – you wonder how there can be so many graduating classes while you stay the same. But, of course, you don’t stay the same.’ Then he said, ‘Well’, sharply, to dismiss the thought. He pulled Blackburn’s arm and swung him around to Howe. ‘Have you heard about Teddy Blackburn?’ he asked. ‘He has a job already, before graduation, the first man of his class to be placed.’ Expectant of congratulations, Blackburn beamed at Howe. Howe remained silent.

‘Isn’t that good?’ the Dean said. Still Howe did not answer and the Dean, puzzled and put out, turned to Hilda.

'That's a very fine-looking camera, Hilda.' She touched it with affectionate pride.

'Instruments of precision,' said a voice. 'Instruments of precision.' Of the three with joined arms, Howe was the nearest to Tertan, whose gaze took in all the scene except the smile and the nod which Howe gave him. The boy leaned on his cane. The broad-brimmed hat, canting jauntily over his eye, confused the image of his face that Howe had established, suppressed the rigid lines of the ascetic and brought out the baroque curves. It made an effect of perverse majesty.

'Instruments of precision,' said Tertan for the last time, addressing no one, making a casual comment to the universe. And it occurred to Howe that Tertan might not be referring to Hilda's equipment. The sense of the thrice-woven circle of the boy's loneliness smote him fiercely. Tertan stood in majestic jauntiness, superior to all the scene, but his isolation made Howe ache with a pity of which Tertan was more the cause than the object, so general and indiscriminate was it.

Whether in his sorrow he made some unintended movement towards Tertan which the Dean checked or whether the suddenly tightened grip on his arm was the Dean's own sorrow and fear, he did not know. Tertan watched them in the incurious way people watch a photograph being taken and suddenly the thought that, to the boy, it must seem that the three were posing for a picture together made Howe detach himself almost rudely from the Dean's grasp.

'I promised Hilda another picture,' he announced – needlessly, for Tertan was no longer there, he had vanished in the last sudden flux of visitors who, now that the band had struck up, were rushing nervously to find seats.

'You'd better hurry,' the Dean said. 'I'll go along, it's getting late for me.' He departed and Blackburn walked stately by his side.

Howe again took his position under the little tree which cast its shadow over his face and gown. 'Just hurry, Hilda,

won't you?' he said. Hilda held the cable at arm's-length, her other arm crooked and her fingers crisped. She rose on her toes and said 'Ready', and pressed the release. 'Thank you,' she said gravely and began to dismantle her camera as he hurried off to join the procession.



TERENCE TILLER

LILITH

If he had been contented with the apple
I hardened for him from the water-shadow;
or known the beasts by my names; or been able
to thread my glamour through the guarded meadow;
if, happy in the rib and single hair
I dressed for him in sweat and he thought woman,
he had not seen or heard the shining air
speak to him; or believed my mirror-demon,
I who am daughter of the glass of God;
or if he had lain still with witchcraft, ridden
the centaur-spider of his enchanted blood
— how could he lose, or want, or know, an Eden?

Angels unsheathed him; Eden drove me out,
binding itself my absence in his love.
Which are the real garden and the doubt?
How can he tell my image from my grave?
He will search after in his own heart,
and find me, and not know if I am Eve.

ANTONIO BALDINI

DESERTER FROM THE MOON

(Translated from the Italian by Margaret Bottrall)

A man found the means of getting to the moon. But once he had got there, he was seized with such a passion to return to the earth that he did not want to see or know anything further, and he immediately put his machine into reverse.

Back at home, he stayed with his arms on the window-sill, looking at the moon which was irradiating the domes, the roofs and the towers of the city.

He thought: to have done so much in order to get there, and then to have seen nothing; to have been busied for years and years with nothing else except finding the means to get there, and then, at the moment of success, to take flight; to have let go all other possibilities, and to have neglected every duty to others and to myself; to have broken with everyone and become estranged from the world so that I am almost universally held to be mad; to have made life on earth intolerable to myself in every way; and finally, having surmounted difficulties which all reckoned to be insurmountable, having triumphed over everything and everybody, having made the entire journey without the slightest incident on the way, without the least breakdown of the machine, and just at the moment when everything seemed to have become so easy, a hesitation of this kind, a flight like this ... no, it's too much, it's a bit too much.

*

He recalled how it had gone:

As I touched earth – or rather, as I touched moon – I was still full of energy and enthusiasm, and I could have continued the journey as far as the sun without feeling the slightest fatigue. I laughed, I sang, I cried like a madman.

Perhaps I was too wrought up, and something gave way. In actual fact, once I had got out of the machine, my high spirits suddenly fell, and I felt myself deprived of every feeling of initiative. In vain I tried to force myself, in vain I tried to gather my ideas together. In a moment, a terrible scattering of thought took place in my mind, and my soul was suddenly invaded by a host of absurd preoccupations; and these were of a kind quite foreign to my usual way of thinking and living up to that time. Completely taken up by my studies and calculations, I might be said to have given comparatively little weight to worldly things, and they used to call me Professor Cloudy for this very reason, that I lived always with my head in the clouds.

Well, the first worry that assailed me in the moon was the uncertainty whether or not I had shut the front door and whether or not I had turned off the gas in the kitchen. And then came a frightful worry about not having left a tip for the house-porter and the postman. Then I remembered that I had not put enough stamps on a letter which I had posted on the evening before my departure. And then I remembered that on that very day the period for paying a certain tax had ended. And all this (in the moon!) made me feel beside myself. Moreover, in the midst of these worries, my imagination began to be cruelly pierced by the remembrance – extremely vivid, hallucinatory – of the immediate surroundings of my house, complete with details which I should never have supposed would register themselves so jealously in my memory. Something written on a wall, a shop window, a fat woman in her chemise behind her half-closed shutters, halves of lemons, green with mould, on the tiles of a roof opposite; and then I see the air vibrating above the chimney-pots, and my nostrils are assailed by the smell of a lamb stew and liver cooked with onions. It was no use looking around and saying to myself: ‘But think where you are.’ What I saw not only did not interest me, I cannot even say that I really saw it at all. I vaguely recall a stony valley, without trees and without houses, in the half light of a stifled dawn. It was a far

from happy view, yet it ought to have pleased me, considering that for months I had done little else but sigh for lunar landscapes still more repulsive than the one I had before my eyes. It was no good. That smell of lamb stew was paralysing my entrails and robbing me of eyesight. The atmosphere up there smelt a little like carbide, but my nostrils needed something very different from acetylene at that moment. And among the things that I missed most, impossible as it seems, were the smells of a newspaper fresh from the press, of rolls warm from the oven, of warm asphalt streets, of a woman warm from her bed, of a great crowd warm from waiting in the sunshine. Though I had a thousand times avowed myself a confirmed hater of women and men, now all of a sudden the temptations of St Anthony and the joys of society violently seized my senses. During the half-hour which I spent up there, I desperately longed to be in the midst of men and women, and I would have given all the stars of the Milky Way to have found myself on the old green upholstered seat of some café on a Sunday afternoon, when people are waiting for a table to be free. In vain I tried to shake myself, in vain at one point I took the road to the mountain in the vain hope of breaking the ice by starting explorations without more ado. A voice said: 'Enough!' It was my own voice, and I was terrified to hear it, so loud and peremptory in my ears. One's own voice in the moon is something that makes the blood run cold! I tried a second time to take the road to the mountain. 'I told you, enough; let us go home.' This time I stopped dead. There was nothing else to be done. I could not take myself bodily and chase myself farther up the road. The passion to return to earth rapidly grew to a point when it convulsed my whole body with tremors. If I did not leave at once, I should burst with longing in the midst of those rocks.

Having no reply to make to himself, the man left the house and went wandering for a while through the city streets. The night was cold and the thoroughfares deserted.

Passing in front of the Old Gate Café, he went in to warm himself. It had been market day, and the place was still full of country people, carters, brokers, excisemen. There were drinkers standing by the counter and dogs yawning under the tables. People were playing cards, smoking, arguing, clinking glasses and spitting on the floor. A gramophone added to the din. A stink of alcohol and pipe-smoke, of peasants and damp sawdust, took one's breath away. The man who had escaped from the moon said to himself, with a bitter smile: 'This, then, is the nice warmth you were sighing for? Enjoy it.' He could not stand it and went out. Brilliant in the midst of the sky, the moon shone down on the big square with its trees and porticos. A great halo of mother-of-pearl encircled its splendid face. The man felt tears bathing his cheeks, and a sudden coolness entered his breast. He crossed the square, his face turned skywards, stumbling on the cobbles, and went down the streets which the moon lighted most brightly. It had a strange effect on him, seeing the moon so white and thinking that he had been there. It was almost a sort of home, now.

Following the murmuring canal, he found himself outside the city walls. A dog bayed at the moon. Idiotic dog, what is there to bay about? The moon sailed tranquilly above the poplars trembling in the wind. The great mother-of-pearl halo was gone, and her face shone clear as burnished steel. He recognised, there on the right, between those two craters, the point where he had landed. Looking back on it, he felt a red flush suffusing his face. 'To think that on Friday I was there ...'

Wandering outside the walls, he came to the street where he lived. The full moon was beating down on the front of his house, where there was a plaque to commemorate the sojourn there, in former days, of a famous calculator. The whole thing was a block of moonlight. The man stopped for a moment in contemplation, then with a sigh he looked for his keys. He looked here and he looked there; he did not have them on him, and there was no one in the house.

Once Menica had finished her chores she used to go home to sleep. What could be done? Nothing. A drunkard's song from the far end of the street came wafting nearer.

'You see?' the moon seemed to say now to her fugitive. 'Wouldn't you have done better to have stayed up here? Now what are you going to do, poor chap, without your key? Take my advice. Come back.'



GEORGE BARKER

SESTINA AT 34

I have come down half your overcrowded avenue
O Rhadamanthus, you to whose kingdom I journey
With several children and several books on my shoulders
All screaming. I have left wounds on some pavements
So that your dogs and furies, hounding the heart to a stone,
Know where I go and where I have left my handmark.

I do not know the purpose of this journey
Between the big breasts and the grounded shoulders
Except that, in some way, by scribbling on pavements,
The man glorifies both himself and the godlike stone.
O morning strike brightness into this handmark
I scrawl across Time in its heavenly avenue!

When my heart groans with babies and books on its
shoulders
This is the proud load of the labouring pavement
Climbing into the sun to burnish a stone.
Christopher, you would know. Saint, set your handmark
On my child-ridden forehead. Water this avenue
With the sweat of an infant-carrier on his journey.

Heavy my love walks ahead on the pavements
With her bare foot wearing my martyrdom on stone:
Everywhere the red heart breaks is a landmark:
I am on the right road, the murderer's avenue.
Mother of all things, Love, approve my journey
With a fair share of lightning on my shoulders.

I am at midday. Bells rage in the stone
Arch of the breast. The sky wears my handmark
Where I have touched it. Summer the avenue

Here where Aligheri started a hotter journey,
Summer more suffering, manhood beating the shoulders,
Than any winter or April. And on the pavements.

Fate, photographer, fixing, in shadow, his handmark:
Recording, for ever, in image along the avenue
The lies and the lives we lived. This is a journey
Dolled by the unsleeping eye. No head and shoulders
Shunning the sinning loin, but, naked as pavements,
Every step stopped a monument in stone.

Avenue of births and myrtles! Lovers in statues
Evolving in the evenings, Eden on a pavement!
O journey of hazard and hero, monster and blizzard,
Who happy unhappy as I when I slip from my shoulders
The heavy bag of the ego, and, dead cat by a pavement,
Lie down under my God's immemorial stone?



J. F. POWERS

THE VALIANT WOMAN

They had come to the dessert in a dinner that was a shambles. 'Well, John,' Father Nulty said, turning away from Mrs Stoner and to Father Firman, long gone silent at his own table. 'You've got the bishop coming for confirmation next week.'

'Yes,' Mrs Stoner cut in, 'and for dinner. And if he don't eat any more than he did last year —'

Father Firman, in a rare moment, faced it: 'Mrs Stoner, the bishop is not well. You know that.'

'And after I fixed that fine dinner and all,' Mrs Stoner pouted in Father Nulty's direction.

'I wouldn't feel bad about it, Mrs Stoner,' Father Nulty said. 'He never eats much anywhere.'

'It's funny. And that new Mrs Allers said he ate just fine when he was there,' Mrs Stoner argued, and then spit out: 'But she's a damned liar!'

Father Nulty, unsettled but trying not to show it, said: 'Who's Mrs Allers?'

'She's at Holy Cross,' Mrs Stoner said.

'She's the housekeeper,' Father Firman added, thinking Mrs Stoner made it sound as though Mrs Allers were the pastor there.

'I swear I don't know what to do about the dinner this year,' Mrs Stoner said.

Father Firman moaned. 'Just do as you've always done, Mrs Stoner.'

'Huh! And have it all to throw out! Is that any way to do?'

'Is there any dessert?' Father Firman asked coldly.

Mrs Stoner leaped up from the table and bolted into the kitchen, mumbling. She came back with a birthday cake.

She plunged it in the centre of the table. She found a big wooden match in her apron pocket and thrust it at Father Firman.

'I don't like this bishop,' she said. 'I never did. And the way he went and cut poor Ellen Kennedy out of Father Doolin's will!'

She went back into the kitchen.

'Didn't they talk a lot of filth about Doolin and the housekeeper?' Father Nulty asked.

'I should think they did,' Father Firman said. 'All because he took her to the movies on Sunday night. After he died and the bishop cut her out of the will, though I hear he gives her a pension privately, they talked about the bishop.'

'I don't like this bishop at all,' Mrs Stoner said, appearing with a cake knife. 'Bishop Doran – there was the man!'

'We know,' Father Firman said. 'All man and all priest.'

'He did know real estate,' Father Nulty said.

Father Firman struck the match.

'Not on the chair!' Mrs Stoner cried, too late.

Father Firman set the candle burning – it was suspiciously large and yellow, like a blessed one, but he could not be sure. They watched the fluttering flame.

'I'm forgetting the lights!' Mrs Stoner said, and got up to turn them off. She went into the kitchen again.

The priests had a moment of silence in the candlelight.

'Happy birthday, John,' Father Nulty said softly. 'Is it fifty-nine you are?'

'As if you didn't know, Frank,' Father Firman said, 'and you the same but one.'

Father Nulty smiled, the old gold of his incisors shining in the flickering light, his collar whiter in the dark, and raised his glass of water, which would have been wine or better in the bygone days, and toasted Father Firman.

'Many of 'em, John.'

'Blow it out,' Mrs Stoner said, returning to the room. She waited by the light switch for Father Firman to blow out the candle.

Mrs Stoner, who ate no desserts, began to clear the dishes into the kitchen, and the priests, finishing their cake and coffee in a hurry, went to sit in the study.

Father Nulty offered a cigar.

'John?'

'My ulcers, Frank.'

'Ah, well, you're better off.' Father Nulty lit the cigar and crossed his long black legs. 'Fish Frawley has got him a Filipino, John. Did you hear?'

Father Firman leaned forward, interested. 'He got rid of the woman he had?'

'He did. It seems she snooped.'

'Snooped, eh?'

'She did. And gossiped. Fish introduced two town boys to her, said: "Would you think these boys were my nephews?" That's all, and the next week the paper had it that his two nephews were visiting him from Eire. After that, he let her believe he was going East to see his parents, though both are dead. The paper carried the story. Fish returned and made a sermon out of it. Then he got the Filipino.'

Father Firman squirmed with pleasure in his chair. 'That's like Fish, Frank. He can do that.' He stared at the tips of his fingers bleakly. 'You could never get a Filipino to come to a place like this.'

'Probably not,' Father Nulty said. 'Fish is pretty close to Minneapolis. Ah, say, do you remember the trick he played on us all in Marmion Hall?'

'That I'll not forget!' Father Firman's eyes remembered. 'Getting up New Year's morning and finding the toilet seats all painted!'

'HAPPY CIRCUMCISION! Hah!' Father Nulty had a coughing fit.

When he had got himself together again, a mosquito came and sat on his wrist. He watched it a moment before bringing his heavy hand down. He raised his hand slowly, viewed the dead mosquito, and sent it spinning with a plunk of his middle finger.

'Only the female bites,' he said.

'I didn't know that,' Father Firman said.

'Ah, yes ...'

Mrs Stoner entered the study and sat down with some sewing – Father Firman's black socks.

She smiled pleasantly at Father Nulty. 'And what do you think of the atom bomb, Father?'

'Not much,' Father Nulty said.

Mrs Stoner had stopped smiling. Father Firman yawned.

Mrs Stoner served up another: 'Did you read about this communist convert, Father?'

'He's been in the Church before,' Father Nulty said, 'and so it's not a conversion, Mrs Stoner.'

'No? Well, I already got him down on my list of Monsignor's converts.'

'It's better than a conversion, Mrs Stoner, for there is more rejoicing in heaven over the return of . . . uh, he that was lost, Mrs. Stoner, is found.'

'And that congresswoman, Father?'

'Yes. A convert – she.'

'And Henry Ford's grandson, Father. I got him down.'

'Yes, to be sure.'

Father Firman yawned, this time audibly, and held his jaw.

'But he's one only by marriage, Father,' Mrs Stoner said. 'I always say you got to watch those kind.'

'Indeed you do, but a convert nonetheless, Mrs Stoner. Remember, Cardinal Newman himself was one.'

Mrs Stoner was unimpressed. 'I see where Henry Ford's making steering-wheels out of soybeans, Father.'

'I didn't see that.'

'I read it in the *Reader's Digest* or some place.'

'Yes, well . . .' Father Nulty rose and held his hand out to Father Firman. 'John,' he said. 'It's been good.'

'I heard Hirohito's next,' Mrs Stoner said, returning to converts.

'Let's wait and see, Mrs Stoner,' Father Nulty said.

The priests walked to the door.

'You know where I live, John.'

'Yes. Come again, Frank. Good night.'

Father Firman watched Father Nulty go down the walk to his car at the kerb. He hooked the screen door and turned off the porch light. He hesitated at the foot of the stairs, suddenly moved to go to bed. But he went back into the study.

'Phew!' Mrs Stoner said. 'I thought he'd never go. Here it is after eight o'clock.'

Father Firman sat down in his rocking-chair. 'I don't see him often,' he said.

'I give up!' Mrs Stoner exclaimed, flinging the holey socks upon the horsehair sofa. 'I'd swear you had a nail in your shoe.'

'I told you I looked.'

'Well, you ought to look again. And cut your toenails. Why don't you? Haven't I got enough to do?'

Father Firman scratched in his coat pocket for a pill, found one, swallowed it. He let his head sink back against the chair and closed his eyes. He could hear her moving about the room, making the preparations; and how he knew them – the fumbling in the drawer for a pencil with a point, the rip of the page from his daily calendar, and finally the leg of the card-table sliding up against his leg.

He opened his eyes. She yanked the floor lamp alongside the table, setting the bead fringe tinkling on the shade, and pulled up her chair on the other side. She sat down and smiled at him for the first time that day. Now she was happy.

She swept up the cards and began to shuffle with the abandoned virtuosity of an old river-boat gambler, standing them on end, fanning them out, whirling them through her fingers, dancing them half-way up her arms, cracking the whip over them. At last they lay before him tamed into a neat deck.

'Cut?'

'Go ahead,' he said. She liked to go first.

She gave him her faint, avenging smile and drew a card, cast it aside for another which he thought must be an ace from the way she clutched it face down.

She was getting all the cards, as usual, and would have been invincible if she had possessed his restraint and if her cunning had been of a higher order. He knew a few things about leading and lying back that she would never learn. Her strategy was attack, for ever attack, with one baffling departure: she might sacrifice certain tricks as expendable if only she could have the last ones, the heartbreaking ones, if she could slap them down one after another, shatteringly.

She played for blood, no bones about it, but for her there was no other way; it was her nature, as it was the lion's, and for this reason he found her ferocity pardonable, more a defect of the flesh, venial, while his own trouble was all in the will, mortal. He did not sweat and pray over each card as she must, but he did keep an eye out for reneging and demanded a cut now and then just to aggravate her, and he was always secretly hoping for aces.

With one card left in her hand, the telltale trick coming next, she delayed playing it, showing him first the smile, the preview of defeat. She laid it on the table – so! She held one more trump than he had reasoned possible. Had she palmed it from somewhere? No, she would not go that far; that would not be fair, was worse than reneging, which so easily and often happened accidentally, and she believed in being fair. Besides he had been watching her.

God smote the vines with hail, the sycamore trees with frost, and offered up the flocks to the lightning – but Mrs Stoner! What a cross Father Firman had from God in Mrs Stoner! There were other housekeepers as bad, no doubt, walking the rectories of the world, yes, but ... yes. He could name one and maybe two priests who were worse off. One, maybe two. Cronin. His scraggly blonde of sixty – take her, with her everlasting banging on the grand piano, the gift

of the pastor; her proud talk about the goitre operation at the Mayo Brothers', also a gift; her honking the parish Buick at passing strange priests because they were all in the game together. She was worse. She was something to keep the home fires burning. Yes, sir. And Cronin said she was not a bad person really, but what was he? He was quite a freak himself.

For that matter, could anyone say that Mrs Stoner was a bad person? No. He could not say it himself, and he was no freak. She had her points, Mrs Stoner. She was clean. And though she cooked poorly, could not play the organ, would not take up the collection in an emergency, and went to card-parties, and told all – even so, she was clean. She washed everything. Sometimes her underwear hung down beneath her dress like a paratrooper's pants, but it and everything she touched was clean. She washed constantly. She was clean.

She had her other points, to be sure – her faults, you might say. She snooped – no mistake about it – but it was not snooping for snooping's sake; she had a reason. She did other things, always with a reason. She overcharged on rosaries and prayer books, but that was for the sake of the poor. She censored the pamphlet rack, but that was to prevent scandal. She pried into the baptismal and matrimonial records, but there was no other way if Father was out, and in this way she had once uncovered a bastard and flushed him out of the rectory, but that was the perverted decency of the times. She held her nose over bad marriages in the presence of the victims, but that was her sorrow and came from having her husband buried in a mine. And he had caught her telling a bewildered young couple that there was only one good reason for their wanting to enter into a mixed marriage – the child had to have a name, and that – that was what?

She hid his books, kept him from smoking, picked his friends (usually the pastors of her colleagues), bawled out people for calling after dark, had no humour, except at

cards, and then it was grim, very grim, and she sat hatchet-faced every morning at Mass. But she went to Mass, which was all that kept the church from being empty some mornings. She did annoying things all day long. She said annoying things into the night. She said she had given him the best years of her life. Had she? Perhaps – for the miner had her only a year. It was too bad, sinfully bad, when he thought of it like that. But all talk of best years and life was nonsense. He had to consider the heart of the matter, the essence. The essence was that housekeepers were hard to get, harder to get than ushers, than willing workers, than organists, than secretaries – yes, harder to get than assistants or vocations.

And she was a SAVER – saved money, saved electricity, saved string, bags, sugar, saved – him. That's what she did. That's what she said she did, and she was right, in a way. In a way, she was usually right. In fact, she was always right – in a way. And you could never get a Filipino to come way out here and live. Not a young one anyway, and he had never seen an old one. Not a Filipino. They liked to dress up and live.

Should he let it drop about Fish having one, just to throw a scare into her, let her know he was doing some thinking? No. It would be a perfect cue for the one about a man needing a woman to look after him. He was not up to that again, not to-night.

Now she was doing what she liked most of all. She was making a grand slam, playing it out card for card, though it was in the bag, prolonging what would have been cut short out of mercy in gentle company. Father Firman knew the agony of losing.

She slashed down the last card, a miserable deuce trump, and did in the hapless king of hearts he had been saving.

'Skunked you!'

She was awful in victory. Here was the bitter end of their long day together, the final murderous hour in which all they wanted to say – all he wouldn't and all she couldn't –

came out in the cards. Whoever won at honeymoon won the day, slept on the other's scalp, and God alone had to help the loser.

'We've been at it long enough, Mrs Stoner,' he said, seeing her assembling the cards for another round.

'Had enough, huh!'

Father Firman grumbled something.

'No?'

'Yes.'

She pulled the table away and left it against the wall for the next time. She went out of the study carrying the socks, content and clucking. He closed his eyes after her and began to get under way in the rocking-chair, the nightly trip to nowhere. He could hear her brewing a cup of tea in the kitchen and conversing with the cat. She made her way up the stairs, carrying the tea, followed by the cat, purring.

He waited, rocking out to sea, until she would be sure to be through in the bathroom. Then he got up and locked the front door (she looked after the back door) and loosened his collar going upstairs.

In the bathroom he mixed a glass of antiseptic, always afraid of pyorrhœa, and gargled to ward off pharyngitis.

When he turned on the light in his room, the moths and beetles began to batter against the screens, the lighter insects humming. . . .

Yes, and she had the guest room. How did she come to get that? Why wasn't she in the back room, in her proper place? He knew, if he cared to remember. The screen in the back room – it let in mosquitoes, and if it didn't do that she'd love to sleep back there, Father, looking out at the steeple and the blessed cross on top, Father, if it just weren't for the screen, Father. Very well, Mrs Stoner, I'll get it fixed or fix it myself. Oh, could you now, Father? I could, Mrs Stoner, and I will. In the meantime you take the guest room. Yes, Father, and thank you, Father, the house ringing with amenities then. Years ago, all that. She was a pie-faced girl then, not really a girl perhaps, but not too old to

marry again. But she never had. In fact, he could not remember that she had even tried for a husband since coming to the rectory, but, of course, he could be wrong, not knowing how they went about it. God! God save us! Had she got her wires crossed and mistaken him all these years for THAT? THAT! Him! Suffering God! No. That was going too far. That was getting morbid. No. He must not think of that again, ever. No.

But just the same she had got the guest room and she had it yet. Well, did it matter? Nobody ever came to see him any more, nobody to stay overnight anyway, nobody to stay very long ... not any more. He knew how they laughed at him. He had heard Frank humming all right – before he saw how serious and sad the situation was and took pity – humming ‘Wedding Bells are Breaking Up that Old Gang of Mine’. But then they’d always laughed at him for something – for not being an athlete, for wearing glasses, for having kidney trouble ... and mail coming addressed to Rev and Mrs Stoner.

Removing his shirt, he bent over the table to read the volume left open from last night. He read, translating easily: ‘*Eisdem licet cum illis* ... Clerics are allowed to reside only with women about whom there can be no suspicion, either because of a natural bond (as mother, sister, aunt) or of advanced age, combined in both cases with good repute.’

Last night he had read it, and many nights before, each time as though this time to find what was missing, to find what obviously was not in the paragraph, his problem considered, a way out. She was not mother, not sister, not aunt, and ADVANCED AGE was a relative term (why, she was younger than he was) and so, eureka, she did not meet the letter of the law – but, alas, how she fulfilled the spirit! And besides it would be a slimy way of handling it after all her years of service. He could not afford to pension her off, either.

He slammed the book shut. He slapped himself fiercely on the back, missing the wily mosquito, and whirled to find it. He took a magazine and folded it into a swatter. Then he

saw it – oh, the preternatural cunning of it! – poised in the beard of St Joseph on the book-case. He could not hit it there. He teased it away, wanting it to light on the wall, but it knew his thoughts and flew high away. He swung wildly, hoping to stun it, missed, swung back, catching St Joseph across the neck. The statue fell to the floor and broke.

Mrs Stoner was panting in the hall outside his door.

‘What is it!’

‘Mosquitoes!’

‘What is it, Father? Are you hurt?’

‘Mosquitoes – damn it! And only the female bites!’

Mrs Stoner, after a moment, said: ‘Shame on you, Father. She needs the blood for her eggs.’

He dropped the magazine and lunged at the mosquito with his bare hand.

She went back to her room, saying: ‘Pshaw, I thought it was burglars murdering you in your bed.’

He lunged again.



LOUIS MACNEICE

AUTOLYCUS

In his last phase when hardly bothering
To be a dramatist, the Master turned away
From his taut plots and complex characters
To tapestried romances, conjuring
With rainbow names and handfuls of sea-spray
And from them turned out happy Ever-afters.

Eclectic always, now extravagant,
Sighting his matter through a timeless prism
He ranged his classical bric-à-brac in grottos
Where knights of Ancient Greece had Latin mottoes
And fishermen their flapjacks – none should want
Colour for lack of an anachronism.

A gay world certainly though pocked and scored
With childish horrors and a fresh world though
Its mainsprings were old gags – babies exposed,
Identities confused and queens to be restored;
But when the cracker burst it proves as you supposed—
Trinket and moral tumble out just so.

Such innocence – In his own words it was
Like an old tale, only that where time leaps
Between Acts Three and Four there was something born
Which made the stock-type virgin dance like corn
In a wind that having known foul marshes, barren steeps,
Felt therefore kindly towards Marinas, Perditas ...

So crystal learned to talk. But Shakespeare balanced it
With what we knew already, gabbing earth
Hot from Eastcheap – Watch your pockets when •

That rogue comes round the corner, he can slit
Purse-strings as quickly as his maker's pen
Will try your heartstrings in the name of mirth.

O master pedlar with your confidence tricks,
Brooches, pomanders, broadsheets and what-have-you,
Who hawking entertainment rook your client
And leave him brooding, why should we forgive you
Did we not know that, though more self-reliant
Than we, you too were born and grew up in a fix?



ANGELOS SIKELIANOS

THE DEATH FEAST OF THE GREEKS

Translated from the Greek by Lawrence Durrell

Because so much my friends desired
To hear new songs of fire upon my lips
Break out as in the past like burning streams
The gusts of song broke out, here to their table
They had invited me, beyond the city,
In some great rooms with windows opening
On to the gardens, with the stars above them.
There a table they had set with roses
Between the crystal cups, and wreaths of greenery
Upon the walls, whose fragrance spread about:
In silver candlesticks they lit
Small flames that bending in the draught
Turned sideways, lengthening, but not going out!...

And here unspeaking we sat down and ate
The frugal meal, and half unwilling
Each in his mind the same thought turned.
But when the black wine was opened –
Wine a dear friend had brought, thinking of me –
Full of savour and fragrant in itself
As the black blood of Dionysus spilled,
He turned towards me with his brimming glass,
And called me by my name: 'Angelos'
He said 'Now Angelos, dear friend,
If you so wish it, speak to us, recite'...

And I: 'You ask me, O my friend, to speak
And yet as you sit there cup in hand,
Filled to the brim, would you not say it put
A final frontier in between our souls,

Between our thoughts and silence, would you not?
Tell me, who first thought of this supper,
Standing above it like a hierophant,
To decorate it so and make it seem so much
A collation for the sacred Pluto,
A walled-in deserted feast of the dead, where here
The thoughts of all partaking burn
At the altar, an offering and a requiem?

It seems to me that as the winged ants alight
Upon an ear of wheat, this feast has stirred
The souls of the dead, they wake in us,
And deep from their eternal darkness rise.
And deep inside us we can feel their tracks,
As if still higher, above the vigil of death,
They went onwards, silent, over the rocks,
Drinking from wells of courage: and of others
Ancient, unnumbered spirits, many, many.
So many filling up the night until
The living are far outnumbered by the dead.
Like moths to candles are they drawn, I feel them
Crowding in every corner, O suffer them only
To come closer, stretch out their hands
Over the table we have set for Pluto,
Over this death-feast, let us suffer them
To enter and be one with us.'

And with this cup you gave me, friend,
Full to the brim wherein I see reflected,
My image, as if from another world:
And with the wine you brought for me –
How rich and full-bodied like the black
Blood of Dionysus spilled, O let us
Commune here as once the Initiates did.
Dipping in Agathodemon's chalice, keeping
Our own deep silence till the time,
And it may not be far, when suddenly

The powers of the God begin to groan in us,
And his shrieks like earthquakes raise
In full array, the dead among the living,
Under the battering of the divine assault ...
As for the new
Songs of fire you so much long to hear,
They too shall find their time.

I spoke. And all who understood me, drank,
And when, the last to drink, I bent my head
To follow them, it was as a priest might drink
Of the grail in some great sanctuary, slowly
Draining the chalice to the last deep drop.
Then each his footsteps softly turned
To the open windows – all the candles now
Had guttered one by one – and saw where black,
Enstarred, the ocean lay of the night,
Dumbly upholding us upon its beat;
In the darkness there – and if none of us
Should ever speak again – from deep within
And final towards the gloom and stars spired up
The same thought and the vow:

Hear O Hear,
Dionysus-Hades, Divine Protector,
Hold back our hearts with the black
Wine of your pain strengthen and save
For the great hour when suddenly Your shout
Rends, like an earthquake, waking us,
Making us one with the dead,
Under the battering of the divine assault.

EDWARD LOWBURY

M U A H I L L S

‘Amepigwa Simba
Aliyerarua ngombi:
Furahi, na imba! ...’

Where did they come from when the lion fell?
There’s no more sign of man than of the lion
Here where the scrub breaks from the scarlet shell
Of Africa! where were they hiding when
The cries of dog and man followed the lion,
And shot battered him with the strength of ten?

Around the lion sprawling on the ground
Black eyes, black heads – Kamba, Kikuyu, Nandi
Sprout like grapes, expert at hanging round
And doing nothing; were they warriors once,
Now gone to seed? and could those helpless hands,
Mere hangers on now, lead the lion a dance?

They stand their ground and take no notice of
The insults of the huntsman, for they know
Their enemy is dead, that is enough:
And soon their bodies fall into a ring,
Their voices fall into a rhythm, and both
Join in together as they dance and sing.

Give them a fire, and from their marrow sprouts
The fire that’s in their blood; give them a drink —
But that’s unnecessary! one who shouts
Does more than wine can do to make them tight,
Digs up the sleepy Past which does not know
What came from the cold North, darkness or light.

Nothing can stop them, nothing can prevent
The tide inside them rising wave on wave
Until they drop like dead, suddenly spent :
Little he knows, the god who leads their dance,
Of the explosive or the god of love,
Of the chained heart, or of the soul's advance.

I catch a glimpse of beaten shield and spear,
Of the ngoma beaten all night long ;
Feel something of the astonishment and fear
Of those first hunters from the North who hawked
Spirit and book, and in exchange took home
Stories which marked them liar if they talked.



DOUGLAS NEWTON

DISGUISES OF THE ARTIST

To Proteus lolling on his private beach
All drowsy from the snoring of his seals
And watching with his drooping eyes the sea —
The oldest element —
Came the wily Ulysses in a passion of guile.

Willing to salve the hero's self-respect,
When the deluded bravo seized his neck
He straight became a lion; then a flame,
In turn an ox, a serpent —
Even, with reservations, water: his sacred home.

He donned the likeness of an honest fellow
Lastly, bored by the ludicrous encounter
(And weary from the wastage of his talent —
Acting, the oldest art) —
What was his question? Proteus asked; and answered truly.

The wily Ulysses duly sailed away.
Having dismissed him to his pop-eyed sailors,
Smiling slyly, Proteus mused on his memoirs —
Rhyming the incident,
He signed it HOMER, *earliest of poets*.

THE CRITICAL VIEW

*

A. D. B. SYLVESTER

A CHAPTER OF REVELATIONS

‘After this I looked, and behold a door was opened . . .’

Revelation iv. 1.

1

The exhibition of all the National Gallery paintings cleaned in the last few years has been an event as momentous as the sudden discovery of a colony of great painters producing works whose like we had never seen before. The names are familiar, but above them are canvases with, in many cases, a freshness of *matière* as if they had been painted yesterday, and an unfamiliarity of conception which shows us that, for the first time in our lives, we are faced with an extensive collection of oil-paintings by Old Masters, not by Old Masters plus Time. The cleaning of pictures is no novelty. What is a novelty is the thoroughness with which the work has been done, resulting in the entire removal of dirty and discoloured varnish, and of restorations obscuring an unnecessarily large area of the original paint.

The profound effect of radical cleaning is shown in a Cuyp which has been only partly cleaned, as a demonstration. Those parts still covered by a film of yellow are inoffensive but negative. Since Cuyp made much less differentiation of tone than of colour between land and sky, and the colour or both has disappeared, almost no distinction now exists between them in the passages still obscured by varnish, which have therefore become flat and meaningless. The cleaned portions are alive with pale, luminous colour, full of space

and air. So also with the cleaned Koninck, whereas the uncleaned specimen by him on the same wall shows how dirty varnish can reduce a painting to the appearance of a faded sepia photograph. As to Constable's *Corn Field*, no one who knows the East Anglian countryside would wish to see this picture in anything but the shimmering radiance which it now possesses, which it possessed when painted, and which the artist, who reacted to brown varnish with the complaint 'there goes all my dew', would have wished to see preserved.

The effect of darkened varnish is not only to *obscure* but to *distort*, because it does not tone down all colours to the same extent. Since it makes all colours warmer, those already warm (such as red and yellow) sometimes become stronger, while those which were cool (such as blue) are inevitably made weaker. Hence the colours of the flower-piece by Van Huysum regain not only their delicacy but their relative value. In its uncleaned state, the picture was dominated by the outside ring of orange. Cleaning has shown that the central white and blue are the true focal point. *A darkened picture is not just an obscure statement but a lie.* The balance of the composition is destroyed by the overemphasis of the warm colours, which always become more powerful in relation to the weakened, cool colours, and sometimes more powerful absolutely. In view of the emotional expressiveness of colour, it is clear that the spirit of the painting must be fundamentally altered. Moreover, three-dimensionality is lost. Red is assertive, blue recessive. Hence, when a painter such as Rubens has modelled a form in pink and pale blue, the disappearance of the blue flattens out that form. Similarly, aerial perspective is nullified, as in the dirty portions of the Cuyp, when the blue which gives an illusion of space and depth is nullified. All this can be seen in two National Gallery Poussins, *The Worship of the Golden Calf* and *Bacchanalian Revel*. The first is uncleaned, and its superb design wrecked by the insupportably lurid orange which has become the predominant colour. In the second, which is cleaned, the cold blues are revealed in their brilliance. Poussin's blue is so

penetrating, so liable to start out of the picture, that he used it with discretion – with the result that in the dirty *Golden Calf* it has become almost negligible. If this picture were cleaned, the orange would be toned down *and* the blues would emerge, to restore the proper balance of colour.

In the case of Velasquez, Rembrandt and Veronese, it is less untruth than obscurity that has been expunged. (More important things than Hendrikje's artificial hand have gone.) All the gorgeous richness of Veronese is now revealed in colours of a cold, lunar luminosity. Velasquez's paint in the full-length portrait of Philip IV is stripped of the dirt which concealed its incredible vitality. Now, as if we had been transported back to the day it was applied to canvas, the impasto glitters as if wet, flows, curls, twists, stands up and bows. At last we are allowed to see the glowing colour which permeates Rembrandt's chiaroscuro. Before the *Young Woman Bathing*, we are more aware than ever of the humanity of its conception, the superhumanity of its execution. For it is easy to persuade ourselves that the brushwork on the shift was done too instantaneously for any human hand and was rather the imprint of a Jovian thunderbolt.

There has been an expulsion of untruths of different kinds from the one already referred to. Certain paintings – including *Woman Bathing* – have been divested of restorations concealing some of the original paint. Others have been divested of incorrect attributions. But the outstanding revelation has evicted more than wrongful attributions, over-paintings, and even obfuscation and distortion of colour. It has shown the truth about Rubens – not augmenting what we already knew of him but telling us that the Rubens we knew was not Rubens at all. No wonder the controversy over the cleaning raged fiercest over him. Whether the Rubens we now see is a greater artist than the one we used to see is a matter of taste. That the Rubens we now see is the Rubens he himself wished us to see is a matter of fact, for in his letters he frequently expressed concern that his pictures might yellow.

In the face of this documentary evidence it is difficult to agree with the author of 'From a Painter's Note-Book' in *Penguin New Writing* 30:

'If the pictures we used to wonder at sometimes seemed quite perversely superhuman that was because no human being contrived them. They were the result of negotiations, Rubens' last treaty. We owe them not to Rubens, but to Time and Rubens, in collaboration. It was certainly his most baffling diplomatic victory of all.'

Baffling indeed, because undesired. Still, that doesn't mean that this writer is wrong in preferring Time plus Rubens to Rubens solo. What are his grounds for favouring the unintended collaboration?

'Much of the unity, that admirable philosophic tone which retained the most violent gesture within due bound, has gone and in its place we are confronted with a heaped-up sum of glittering particulars.'

Substituting concrete for philosophic tones, what this means presumably is that much of the baroque sweep has been lost. What I wish to suggest is that this baroque sweep is not Rubens' most essential quality, and that it becomes more conspicuous than his other, to him more important, qualities only when these are rendered invisible. The true baroque artist is above all a dramatic artist – and this is precisely what Rubens is not: he is theatrical, but in a coarse and prosaic way; if he stood or fell by his drama, he would not be the supreme artist that he is. Rubens' spirit is closer to that of Renoir than to that of El Greco. There is no deep emotional content in his work; he is *par excellence* a maker of landscapes in colour and impasto, with little interest in the emotive significance of forms and great delight in their appearance and in their tactile qualities. (He is, perhaps, more intrigued by the tactile than by the visual: this is where he differs from the less subjective, less voluptuous, more

all-seeing Velasquez.) He is excited less by emotion than by sensation: the soundness and softness of a breast, the glow and texture of a fabric, the pink and white of flesh – *he* was not responsible for the margarine hue of the ladies in *The Judgement of Paris* prior to its cleaning – the vibrance and light of atmosphere, the cut and thrust of forms. When the author of 'From a Painter's Note-Book' talks of a 'heaped-up sum of glittering particulars', surely he cannot mean just that? No other artist has so revealed the glitter of particulars without heaping them up. His impressions are superbly organized, and this organization gains rather than suffers by cleaning, which reveals its complexity in unity. Rubens lacked the dramatic vision of the true baroque artist, but he used the baroque idiom to serve his own end of combining rhythmically the forms in which he delighted. In a true baroque painting, the parts are important chiefly in their relation to the whole; in the quasi-baroque of Rubens, the whole is that in which the parts cohere. This is suggested by his frequent practice of adding pieces to a panel in the course of painting, which indicates that the parts and not the whole were his point of departure. If cleaning a Rubens destroys some of the spurious unity which it has acquired, this does not matter as it might in the case of a true baroque artist, whose work might be expected to lose some of its essential quality, *i.e.*, its drama. But, in fact, the best baroque paintings do not lose any unity when cleaned, simply because unity is so fundamental in their conception. This is confirmed by the cleaning of two of the National Gallery El Grecos.

The cleaning of Rubens' work reveals its characteristic spirit, especially his perception of tactile values – the first thing to disappear under a coating of varnish. Those who dislike the result do so because they are asking of Rubens that he should do what he never intended to do and what was done better by others, and because they cannot accept the contribution to our æsthetic experience which is peculiarly his.

2

In the nineteenth century, the English middle-classes approached the Deity by way of cleanliness. It follows, perhaps, that they identified painting with the Devil, since they approached it by way of dirtiness. A picture was admired if covered by a veneer of brown varnish obscuring colour and disguising form. There was no peace for those who tried to draw back the veil: Constable and Turner, in the practice of their art; the Trustees of the National Gallery in their efforts to demummify some of their charges. That even Ruskin was in one case amongst those who reviled the Trustees reflects the extent of the prejudice in favour of obfuscation.

Nowadays, a colour-scheme of pervading brown, reducing paintings to monochrome, is less fashionable than when it was so much in demand that dealers and amateurs were not content even with the brown produced by the natural darkening of varnish, but added brown pigment to it to assist the elements in their slow war on colour. Yet, though it is now generally conceded that handsome pictures need not be quite so sunburned, the battle has not died down between the genuine traditionalists, whose love for the masters produces a desire to *see* their paintings, and pseudo-traditionalists whose favourite Old Master is Time, wielding a dirt-laden brush to guard them from contact with living works of art. Though the Nay-sayers now admit that an old painting ought not to look like an old violin, a rearguard action has lately been fought with new weapons, namely, *how not if*, on the traditional battlefield of the correspondence columns of *The Times*. Diplomatic relations between the National Gallery and the Royal Academy were disrupted by the cleaning of the pictures by Rubens, Rembrandt and Koninck. The main attack was made on the grounds that cleaning was all very well, but that it had been taken too far, thus causing irretrievable damage to the original paint. A less naïve group, realizing the unlikelihood of a competent modern restorer causing such damage, was content to charge

the restorers with laying bare damage done formerly. An exhibition of all pictures cleaned in recent years was demanded and the Gallery has accepted the challenge. In my view, anyone willing to approach it with an unbiased eye and mind is bound to find the evidence of the pictures themselves and of the strikingly detailed catalogue a complete vindication of the Trustees. 'Vindication' is, indeed, too defensive a word. Trustees, Director and restorers are deserving of gratitude and applause for their work.

Before examining on their intrinsic merits some of the arguments used by these opponents of cleaning, it is worth pointing out that every practising artist among them exhibits his work at Burlington House. Normally, the *argumentum ad hominem* is morally and logically dubious, but, when assessing judgments so determined by subjective attitudes as they must be here, for the real argument has been on matters of taste and not, as pretended, of fact, it is valid to take into account the speaker and his æsthetic outlook.

Something is also gained by recalling the history of the controversy, ten years back, in which the current weapon of argument was used. The subject was the Velasquez full-length portrait, *Philip IV in Brown and Silver*. The mentality and scholarship of the opponents of cleaning is represented by these two typical remarks then made by the critic of the *Daily Telegraph*:

'... the patina of natural age has disappeared, and, I think, the touch of the master along with it. . . . It is probable that Velasquez mixed paint with the varnish, and that in removing the latter the upper layer of the work has been destroyed.'

The first remark appears to suggest that the 'touch of a master' is merely the touch of Time, while the second states as almost a fact a suggestion about Velasquez's technique made by no responsible authority. Painters even before Reynolds sometimes, but very rarely, added a little resin to their

medium, but this would not lie over the surface and, therefore, be easily accessible to a solvent. In his reference to mixing pigment with varnish, the critic of the *Telegraph* was probably confusing varnish, as many others have done, with the semi-transparent *glazes* of oil-paint used by the masters – glazes which are almost impossible to remove with a *varnish*-solvent because of their hardness.

The controversy on this one picture continued for three months, but the ghost was laid once and for all when Spanish experts who had formerly doubted the authenticity of the picture and noted the presence of inferior passages, not only attributed it beyond all question to Velasquez but recognized it to be one of his finest portraits. This might have been taken as a warning. But no sooner had certain works, cleaned during and since the war, been exhibited in 1946, than Sir Gerald Kelly, R.A., wrote to *The Times* in a manner which unwittingly told us more about the author than about the subject:

‘Assuming that all the damage in these pictures, now revealed to our disillusioned eye, was done in the past, surely it is unwise to spoil the unity of an old picture just to lay bare the ruined state of the original?’

The key-phrase is ‘Unity of an old picture’. Concepts like ‘unity’ should not be used as a basis for argument without careful definition. Since Sir Gerald Kelly offers none, we are compelled to seek the meaning implied by the context. It is clear that Sir Gerald cannot be referring to equilibrium of spatial relations or the unity of linear rhythm, since these lose their clarity when obscured by dirty varnish. It is equally clear that he cannot mean harmonious relations of tone and colour, since the former are falsified and the latter disguised by dirty varnish. All that he can mean, then, is an absence of outstanding incident, and a lack of brilliance, discord of colour, tension of form – in short, *monotony*. Moreover, this unity is highly ephemeral, since its preservation can only be

ensured by preserving fortuitous wear and tear. Discounting the magic of the word, why should such unity be preserved? Evidently because there are persons who wish to suppress contrasts of colour – the discords which are an integral part of colour-harmony. They do so at the price of destroying the unity of the artist's conception – for this was contained in the balance of colour which, as was explained above, is distorted by dark varnish.

Nevertheless, there are many who derive pleasure from this bogus unity, and it is worth considering how Sir Gerald Kelly proposes to preserve it without the assistance of the dirt of centuries. Following the appearance of a *Times* leader sympathetic to the policy of the Trustees, Sir Gerald published a statement from which these extracts are drawn:

‘... the issue is not . . . between those who support cleaning and those who oppose it; it is between two different methods of cleaning. No reasonable person can doubt that pictures must of necessity be cleaned; the problem is, how should they be cleaned?’

‘I believe the method employed by the authorities of the National Gallery involves unnecessary risks. It is based on the principle that all the discoloured varnish must be taken off, and that the layers of which it is composed must be removed in a single process. This is dangerous because the lowest layers of the varnish are difficult to distinguish from the very thin and delicate film of paint with which many artists finished their paintings. If any of this by good fortune remains, it may well be more delicate and even softer than the lowest layer of varnish.’

This is sheer phantasy. The thin finishing layer of paint may be delicate in colour, but it is far from delicate in texture. Because it is thin it necessarily contains an abnormally high proportion of medium, which is the binder, to pigment, which is granular, and therefore resists any solvent *more*, not less, than thicker paint.

'The alternative method,' continues Sir Gerald, 'which is a long one, is as follows: the picture is cleaned with a very weak solvent, and the whole surface is worked over evenly and gradually, not sharply and in patches.' [There follows an account, of which space forbids reproduction, of the 'several advantages' of this method.]

'The alternatives are not, therefore, cleaning and no cleaning, but rather the use, on the one hand, of a method which appears to involve unnecessary risks, or, on the other, of one which gives the greatest security against damage and leaves at every stage an opportunity of stopping the process at the wisest moment.

'The method I believe in has only one disadvantage – it is extremely slow. Is there such a hurry? Are not these pictures of great value? Is not damage to a picture irretrievable?'

The last paragraph seems to contradict Sir Gerald's practice, since several Dulwich Gallery pictures were cleaned hurriedly a short time before they were exhibited at the National Gallery. However, that is beside the point, as the results are neither better nor worse than in the case of other charges of Sir Gerald's whose cleaning occupied many months. Sir Gerald's declared aim is to leave a level skin of old varnish on the surface of the paint. In the Dulwich College pictures this skin is broken and uneven – in some places cleaned off to lay bare patches where the paint itself has been rubbed away (in the past, one trusts); in others still lying thickly upon or clotted in the impasto. The resulting patchiness of surface is, indeed, such that, in certain paintings by Poussin, the foreground figures stand out as if pasted to the canvas. In short, what we learn from the cleaning of the Dulwich Gallery pictures is that it is impossible to ensure that a level skin of old varnish be retained, that the only sure way of removing the varnish to an even level is to remove it all. If, subsequently, one wishes to restore the 'mystery' which is said to appertain to darkened paintings, Time's handiwork

can be simulated perfectly by a judicious application of oil-wax glazes of golden ochre, Davies grey and Indian yellow together with 'rotten stone'.

Other contributions to the controversy were more frankly subjective, and, inevitably, question-begging. For example, the President of the Royal Academy suggested that two young A. R. A.'s who had said their piece were 'upholding tradition'. Again the undefined concept. What does Sir Alfred Munnings understand by tradition? It is doubtful whether its connotation for him includes Veronese and Velasquez, Rubens and Rembrandt, Koninck and Constable, for there is no documentary evidence to suggest that they desired their works to be exhibited in a form other than that in which they left them, while there *is* documentary evidence that Rubens and Constable had a positive horror of this state of affairs. It is far more probable that Sir Alfred's notion of 'tradition' is tied exclusively to the tradition of Burlington House, which has long been notorious for its addiction to dark varnish. Why the Trustees of the National Gallery should bow to this tradition we are not informed. Perhaps it has something to do with Landseer's lions in Trafalgar Square.

Incompetence on the part of the restorers, together with irresponsibility on the part of the Trustees, was a recurring imputation throughout the controversy. To say the least, it is naïve to suppose that the Trustees and Director of the National Gallery are unaware of their responsibilities, and more than a little childish to imply that the best restorers in the country don't know their job. Is it likely that, with all the resources of modern scientific methods of research and cleaning at their command, the several restorers engaged in the work would be incompetent or wilfully destructive? Is it likely that they would have anything to learn from the gratuitous advice of amateurs? Is it likely that the Director and restorers of the National Gallery would lightly undertake the removal of all the varnish from a picture whose original paint had suffered extensive damage? Or that the

Trustees would vest their trust in such persons? Each of these questions is answered in the negative by the current exhibition.

When the exhibition opened last October, the controversy had been in suspension for nearly a year. The exhibition was greeted with unqualified praise by the art critic and in the editorial columns of *The Times*. The former opponents have made only the most half-hearted attempts to revive a dying cause. Inasmuch as that cause was supposedly based on factual grounds, its death-sentence has been pronounced in the editorial of December's *Burlington Magazine*:

'The information given in the catalogue of the National Gallery Exhibition, combined with the documentation, should be sufficient to convince any suspicious outsider that the risk of removing original paint is in almost every case negligible.... The outcry that pictures had been "skinned" or "irretrievably" ruined – by which was meant presumably not that they were ruined but that they could no longer be enjoyed – was not only hysterical but senseless.'

3

What has so far been made clear is that the original condition of a picture can be revealed without damaging it, and that the effect of doing so is pleasing to my sensibility. There are others, however, to whose sensibilities fiction is in this case more attractive than truth, as it has every right to be. Their taste must be respected. Cleaning has to be justified not only by the resulting gain in historical truth, not only because many Old Masters would have desired it, but because it leads to a greater enjoyment of the pictures. If we eliminate considerations of taste, we are in danger of eliminating the personal contact between the picture and ourselves and leaving only a museum exhibit. The subjective response may be arbitrary, but it is what matters in our experience of art. If, therefore, we restore pictures to their

original state merely to achieve truth, at the expense of pleasure, we are transforming them from works of art into museum furniture (as the National Gallery authorities did *not* when they left Rubens' *The Brazen Serpent* only partly cleaned after realizing, following removal of the top dirt and some of the old varnish, that it might lose rather than gain by further treatment).

But when the time comes to choose between the conflicting tastes of different visitors to the Gallery, whose taste is to be respected above all? Not that of the layman, whose attitude is too casual. Not that of the artist, whose attitude is too egocentric, since he cannot help seeking in the Old Masters a justification for his own practice, and therefore, whether he is academic or modern, wants their work to look like his. Those whose taste must be considered are the experts on the work under consideration, for it is they who devote their lives to attaining a disinterested intimacy with it. The almost certain consequence would be the perpetuation of the National Gallery's policy of extreme cleaning, because, while the superficial observer tends to like the work of an original artist toned down and robbed of its particularities, the expert finds it most satisfying when rid of excrescences which conceal those particularities. That is why all who approach the Old Masters with devotion and intelligence and humility have found that the National Gallery cleanings of the last decade have revealed not only historical truths but a richness and personality hitherto seen through a glaze darkly.

ANDRÉ GIDE

PAUL VALÉRY

Translated from the French by Dorothy Bussy

Nothing could do greater honour to our Provisional Government than the magnificent funeral officially bestowed on Paul Valéry, with a pomp and circumstance worthy of that most eminent representative of the genius of France – Paul Valéry, thanks to whose shining light our country still keeps her supreme rank in the spiritual world, in spite of our historic reverses and our apparent wretchedness. Such recognition is as astonishing as it is remarkable, for Paul Valéry's outstanding value is of the kind that does not appeal to popular favour. That it was indirectly and, as it were, unintentionally, of immense service to France is a fact that could be appreciated only by very few. His activity was unconcerned with public affairs and was exercised in a region set apart, aloof from events, but one where, unknown to ourselves, our destinies are being played for. 'Events bore me,' he used to say. 'Events are the froth of circumstance. It's the sea I'm interested in. It's the sea we fish in; the sea we sail on; the sea we dive into.'

And no one ever dived deeper than he.

*

From his early youth he was stirred by a secret ambition. I cannot imagine a nobler one. Compared with it, that of Balzac's heroes only raises a smile. But even on the profane and worldly plane that is theirs, Valéry succeeded as well as, and indeed better than, any of them. He knew how honours are won; he knew what they are worth and what they cost in peace of mind. He was willing to pay the price, if only to show others and prove to himself that there was nothing in them out of his reach. What he wanted was the right to despise such things. For his inclination was to despise things in

general. There lies his strength. The domination he desired was of a different kind – the domination of the mind itself. Anything else seemed to him derisory. To dominate not the minds of others, but his own; to know its working, to make himself master of that, in order to use it as he chose. It was towards this that his efforts were constantly directed. A queer kind of Narcissus, wishing to dominate Mind by means of Mind. Anything more than that was of no interest to him; not the object itself, no; but the means of obtaining it – when he wished – how he wished; *to be able* to.... ‘My nature,’ he would say, ‘is potential.’ It is fortunate for us that Valéry chose to apply his method to literary ends. ‘The field of letters,’ said he, ‘is the one in which I thought it would be easiest to exist.’ From henceforward, he considered his most admirable poems, his most accomplished prose in the light of *exercises** – ‘Q.E.D.’s.’ This is how he spoke of his *Jeune Parque*. And I have no doubt that he could have exercised the sovereign method he applied here in any other field and with the same triumphant results. Yes; I can easily imagine Paul Valéry a great statesman, a great diplomat, a financier, a man of science, an engineer or a doctor. And I even wonder whether he might not have been as eminent in architecture, painting or music as he was in poetry; though these, indeed, require special gifts. But Valéry possessed those gifts, too, in almost equal measure.

Like Edgar Allan Poe, he started from this principle – that the artist, be he painter, poet or musician, must take as the ground on which to build, not his own emotion, but that which he wishes to excite in his listener, his spectator or his reader. Like the actor Diderot holds up to our admiration in his *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, his business is not to be moved but to be moving. This was Leonardo da Vinci’s and Wagner’s procedure. Valéry would not believe in the Romantics’ ‘Muse’, and made a mock of what is called ‘Inspiration’. He would willingly have taken as his motto

* Everything I think about art is related to the idea of ‘*exercise*’.

Flaubert's saying: 'Inspiration? It consists in sitting down to one's writing-table every day at the same time.' To the very end of his life, Valéry rose before dawn and, till other people disturbed him by waking, he worked.

He worked, I suppose, in the same way as Descartes, not precisely at any special task, but at pursuing his thoughts to their last entrenchments. During nearly twenty years, while his companions of early days were striving over productions which he considered of slight importance, Valéry was silently searching. When confronted with any work of value, he would ask himself: 'How was it done?' The made dish appealed to him far less than the recipe. He scorned chance flashes of genius. And in particular, he couldn't endure being taken in. When we were still quite young (we were barely twenty when there began between us that inestimable intercourse which was only to end with his death) he pinned up on his bedroom wall the famous maxim (I have forgotten the Greek): 'Never cease to mistrust.' And, in fact, he treated everything with mistrust – human beings, objects, convictions, professions of faith, faith itself; and above all, words – and we know what latent energy is released by the disintegration of those dangerous atoms.

I remember one evening his reading aloud to me one or other of Maurice Barrès' eloquent speeches (we were sitting together in a little café in the Boulevard St Germain, near the Ministry of War, where at that time Valéry filled some very insignificant post). With a smile, he raised his voice oratorically, then, diverging from the text, but without changing his tone and as though continuing to read from it, he finally wound up: 'And we see rising before us the spectre of (here a pause) *hideous* facility!' The scorn and horror he felt for all facility lay at the bottom of those inflexible demands he made upon himself – demands which were to carry him so far. In the meantime he *produced nothing*.

His silence began at last to make us uneasy; some of us would speak of it ironically. 'And what about your great

Valéry, who made such a brilliant start? He has stopped short at those few early poems of his. Full of promise, no doubt, but now he's turned silent. He'll always be silent. You must admit you rather over-rated him. He has petered out already ...' He began to be taken for a 'would-be' and already almost for a 'might-have-been'.

His talk, however, was as dazzling as ever. So much so that I began to fear that he would rest satisfied with that. I was anxious too lest, with his love of precision, the attraction of mathematics might prove too much for him. In those days it was not at a table that he worked, with a sheet or two of white paper, but at an enormous blackboard, which was very much in the way in the humble little room he lived in at that time.* He used to draw strange signs on it, complicated equations, and I understood not a word of the formulæ, which he insisted on explaining to me lengthily, in spite of my incompetence; for he cared very little whether he was understood or not, and it was more for himself or to himself that he talked, than to others. This was the reason, too, that he paid so little attention to his enunciation which all his life was exceedingly indistinct. It often happened that the flocks of faithful that sat under him at the Collège de France, the Vieux Colombier, the Sorbonne or elsewhere, had to be content with seeing him and give up any hope of understanding him, unable as they were to ask him to repeat his words, as was possible in private conversation. For that matter, he was often satisfied with any listener who seemed sufficiently attentive and allowed him to flow on to his heart's content, without interrupting him. In the days of our youth, he used to sing the praises of a certain 'interlocutor', who was as deferential and silent as could be wished, drinking in his words and content with expressing his rapt admiration by looks alone. Valéry used to meet him every day at the same hour on the outside of a bus. This unknown individual aroused my curiosity. I was jealous of him. Who could he be? . . . After a series of investigations, I discovered

* Impasse Royer-Collard at the end of the Rue Gay-Lussac.

at last that he was the swimming master of the Rochechouart swimming baths.

It was mathematics that chiefly occupied his thoughts at this time, not at first geometry, for which he began by showing an utter lack of comprehension. 'When,' he said, 'at school, I first heard a professor say, "Take the triangle A B C and superimpose it on the triangle A B C", my brain refused to follow.* What on earth could it mean? It's useless to go on. I'll have none of it.' Let others judge if such an exclusion of geometry is reasonable. I doubt whether Valéry was able to keep it up, seeing that, on the other hand, he went on undauntedly with the study of astronomy. He gave Lobachevsky, Clerk Maxwell and Reimann an attention he denied all purely literary works. Once, when he was staying with me at La Roque, he was delighted to find on his bedside-table a copy of Clerk Maxwell's works which I had had the pleasure of getting for him. One evening he took down from my shelves the two volumes of Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which he returned next morning, saying he had spent part of the night reading them.

'What!' I cried, 'all through?'

'Oh! Quite enough. I'm acquainted now with the book's general run, which is pleasing enough. I've seen where it starts from and where it gets to. Between the two, it's just filling up. A good secretary who had caught the hang of it, would have done very nearly as well. The *Farà da se* doesn't interest me.'

He was very quick to assimilate the small amount of nourishment to be found in a book, and oftener than not, once he had gathered the gist of it, his curiosity passed on to other things. Lingerings, even among delights, gave him no pleasure. *Ars non stagnat* was his motto; and, as he esteemed a work of art only so far as the artist could reproduce it at will, 'Why reproduce,' thought he, 'what has already been

* He recurred to this incidentally in 1934 when in his essay, *Fluctuations sur la Liberté*, he wrote, 'I cannot even conceive the equality of figures as used in geometry'.

done to perfection?' The important thing was to bring each undertaking to perfection as quickly as possible, so as to be able to leave it then and there. And so, after he had got his hand in by the 'exercises' of the *Jeune Parque*, he went on to perfect, one after the other, those accomplished works, his great poems. He went forward unceasingly, thinking shame not to hide his gropings, his retouches, his first drafts, leaving his fellow-writers behind to go on indefatigably repeating the same verses, the same books, or, without having made any progress, their equivalents.

He had, in fact, no little contempt for literature, and particularly for novels. The truth is, he was not interested in other people, at any rate as individuals, for he refused to give in to – I was going to say – sympathy, but I don't want the word to be misunderstood, or that it should be thought I mean he was incapable of affection. No; only that he was unwilling to allow the thoughts or emotions of others to trespass, by contagion, on his own domain. Wasn't this what La Rochefoucauld meant when he wrote: 'I am little susceptible to pity and wish I were not so at all?'

In consequence, his admirations in the field of letters were rare, more and more grudging, and quickly outgrown or outworn. I was astonished to find, for instance, that the feeling he had at first professed for Stendhal* made him smile at the latter end of his life; he then paradoxically declared that he preferred Restif de la Bretonne or Casanova. For that matter he read little, feeling no need to have recourse to others in order himself to think.

I believe, however, that his devotion to Mallarmé persisted unaltered. He looked on him as his master and predecessor in the arduous path he himself was to tread after him, but in which, as I think, he was soon to surpass him. With all this, Valéry was one of the most faithful of friends. 'I am in love with friendship,' he might have said with

* 'I have no interest in, I have no need of his emotions,' he said of Stendhal in particular. 'I only want him to instruct me as to his methods'.

Montesquieu. Notwithstanding his aversion to sentimentality, he gave his intimates many proofs of the sensibility and tenderness of his heart, but also of his extreme reserve, which was so great that he would, no doubt, blame me for mentioning them. This reputed cynic was capable of the most exquisite attentions and kindnesses towards the people he was attached to. Now that he is no longer with us, I may be permitted to tell how, shortly after Mallarmé's death, he came to me saying: 'There is some talk of putting up a memorial to him and there will be, very properly, lists of subscribers in the newspapers. But Mallarmé has left a widow and daughter in the apartment we used to go to so often, and its rent has to be paid. How? Nobody cares about that. I'm not able to undertake this expense by myself, but I thought you might perhaps help me. You won't say anything about it though, will you?'

Throughout his life he was preoccupied by money matters and was in constant fear of running short. It was this, as well as his desire to oblige, that prevented him disentangling himself from the unending demands, solicitations, requests to which he was subject. Hence, his innumerable addresses and prefaces. 'People,' he wrote, 'seem not to understand or not to believe – and yet I have repeated it often enough – that the greater part of my work has been written in *answer* to requests or to chance circumstances, and that without these solicitations or necessities coming from outside, it would not exist.' The excessive number of engagements with which he allowed himself to be burdened, exhausted him. He longed to throw up the sponge and beg for mercy. 'All these overcharming persons,' he said, 'will kill me. Do you know the epitaph that ought to be inscribed on my tomb? "Here lies Paul Valéry, done to death by others".' Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that many of his best pages were elicited in this way. For that matter, nothing he wrote could afford to be neglected. Dipping into his accumulated reserves, he scattered his treasures about him in a sparkling shower. His writings, however, were of so rare

a quality that they appealed only to a restricted public. His books were not best sellers. Their teaching could be understood only by an élite, and indeed, it was not desirable it should reach a larger circle, for like Nietzsche's, it might very well lead astray those readers it fails to invigorate.

His reputation, meanwhile, soon spread, and not only in France. Cecil Rhodes, having heard Valéry well spoken of, I don't exactly know by whom, sent for him to London when he was still quite young, to entrust him with some highly important work. Bound over to secrecy and moreover little given to being expansive, it was to very few people that Valéry confided this extraordinary adventure, which was particularly surprising in such an uneventful life as his. As soon as he got back from London, where his mysterious task kept him some weeks, he told me the story, which I barely remember, of the strange conditions to which he had been subjected. As for the nature of the work itself, his vow of silence forbade him to say a single word concerning it. I only heard that immediately on arrival in England, he was met by an individual whose name he never learnt, and then taken to London and deposited in a kind of apartment which was comfortable but hermetically sealed from the outer world. During the whole of his stay he was not once allowed out and was forbidden to communicate with a living soul. A servant, who was either a real or pretence deaf-mute or someone who knew no common language, brought him his meals every day and went away again without having opened his lips. This almost pleasant jail ended only when Valéry had finished his job. He was then taken back to the port where he had landed, by the same individual who had met him, and kept only a dream-like memory of the whole affair.

Certain journalists have mentioned a situation he is said to have taken at the Agence Havas in 1900 and kept for a considerable time. This is not quite the case. The truth is that old M. Lebey, the founder of the famous Agency, engaged him as his private secretary, reader and adviser – a

confidential post, in which Valéry had ample opportunities of exercising his sagacity, his competence in political, diplomatic and financial matters, the sureness of his judgment, his probity, his tact and finally, the exquisite courtesy of his manners and the sensitiveness of his feelings. He used to speak of the old gentleman, to whom he became much attached, with great deference; 'something like old M. Leuwen' he would say. He suffered from a form of trembling paralysis which deprived him of the control of his movements. When people came to see him, as he was unable to hold out his hand because of its shaking, he would say: 'Please hold on to my hand.' Seated in a big armchair, he used to listen to Valéry reading aloud the newspapers or Bourdaloue's sermons, which he preferred to Bossuet's; but Valéry confessed to me that he used often to skip whole pages. This lasted months and years. He no doubt learnt a great deal in the company of this wise old man and in the discharge of his delicate duties, which brought into play the practical qualities of his mind. When, leaving the abstract region of mathematics, he turned his eyes on the present day world (*Regards sur le Monde Actuel*), his views and judgments were so far-seeing that they strike us now as being prophetic, and I think that at that time no one can have had a sounder appreciation of the situation in Europe and France.

What he wrote in 1927 on the subject of the French nation is still strikingly applicable and remarkably appropriate at the present time:

'This country, full of nerves and contrasts as she is, finds unexpected resources in those very contrasts. The secret of her prodigious power of resistance lies, perhaps, in the great and manifold differences that she combines within herself. In the French people, apparent lightness of character is allied to singular endurance and resilience. The general ease and pleasantness of social relations in France are accompanied by a critical acuteness which is always on the alert. Perhaps she is the only country in which ridicule has played

an historic part; governments have been undermined and overthrown by it, and a witticism or a happy – sometimes too happy – shaft is enough, in the eyes of the public, to damage, almost instantaneously, powers and reputations of the highest importance. *On the other hand, a kind of natural indiscipline may be observed among the French, which always gives way when the necessity for discipline becomes evident. It happens that the nation is suddenly found to be united at the very moment that it might have been expected to be divided.*

Before retreating into silence, Valéry consented to publish two works, one immediately after the other, in two different reviews – ‘*La Méthode de Léonard de Vinci*’ (1894) in Madame Adam’s *Nouvelle Revue* and, in *Le Centaure*, at that time edited by Pierre Louys, the astounding ‘*Soirée avec M. Teste*’ (1895). To that extraordinary creation, unparalleled in any other tongue, to that accomplished and perfect work, each one of us was compelled to do homage. As he had just disclosed his method to us through the medium of Leonardo, Valéry, thanks to this semi-mythical alibi, here revealed his ethic, his attitude towards things, beings, ideas, life. This he maintained and to the end remained faithful – constant to himself, so that a little while before his death he was able to say (I quote his very words): ‘The principal themes round which I have grouped my thoughts are still in my mind, UNSHAKABLE.’ He spoke this last word strongly, accentuating each syllable.

*

But let there be no mistake. Monsieur Teste is not Valéry, but only a projection of him – of a Valéry stripped of the playfulness, the poetic humour, the charming grace, of everything, in fact, that made us love him. Doubtless he considered all the stir and bustle that went on around him as vanity and worthy only of a passing attention, but more often, as long as he was not disturbed by it, he looked on it with indulgence or even with the kind of amusement we sometimes take in the trifling games of children. I remember in bygone days with what amazing gusto he manipulated

the marionettes of a little Punch and Judy theatre, in order to entertain his family circle, just as, at a later time, he lent himself to the play of society conversation and drawing-room comedy. For that matter he enjoyed it; petted, made much of, listening very little, talking a great deal, sparkling with wit, he was manifestly amused by his easy successes, or rather, by the very ease with which he won his successes. Even with his intimates, the gravity of his thoughts never clouded the amenity of his temper. Nothing can be more instructive on this point than the fictitious Madame Teste's letter – an incomparable work of exquisite delicacy and a singular revelation of our mathematician's secret sensibility. 'I think,' he makes Madame Teste say, rather plaintively, of her terrible husband, 'I think he is too logical in his ideas.' And in another passage (*Orientem Versus*) Valéry, fully conscious of the deadly danger of being too implacably rigorous, writes: 'I'm impatient of vagueness. It's a kind of malady – a peculiar irritability, directed against life, for life would be impossible if we refused to accept the *near enough*.'

Yes, literature is laid over a ground of *near enough*; it's in the *near enough* that we are all floundering. I was only too much aware of this in his presence, and the charm of his manner did not always prevent me from feeling abashed. It was his great respect for others, as well as his own indifference, that enabled him to tolerate a religious turn of mind, but solely in others, for, needless to say, he himself refused to accept any creed whatever. He had a particular aversion to Protestantism, which strips the Christian religion of all that Catholicism has bestowed on it – its outward charm, the political order of its structure, the practised experience of its relationships. So that he took sides with the Jesuits and against Pascal. He had, moreover, a loathing of religious phraseology and indeed, for all vague expressions. To such *assignats*, paper money with nothing behind them, he would give no credit. And this reminds me of an absurd example of that delightful vivacity of which I was speaking just now:

A slight feverish attack had kept me in bed for several days. He came to see me, and as he sat by my bedside, we had a long talk. What about? The Christian virtues, I believe. And as I took up their defence, I let fall the word 'abnegation'. Paul started up, sprang from his chair and rushed to the door in pretended agitation:

'Ice!' he shouted. 'Quick! Bring some ice! The patient is delirious! He is abnegating!' – thus inventing an impossible French word – '*Il Abnègue*.'

Full of deference for others, I said, but not of respect. Deference is a first convenient stage on the road to veneration, and veneration implies respect. Now Valéry knew how much respect interfered with us. 'The white man possesses a quality which has enabled him to make his way – disrespect,' writes Henri Michaux, disrespectfully. Valéry, whose mind wanted 'to make its way', was not to be stopped by any form of laziness. He said laughingly (or did he write it?): 'It's curious how many people lose their lives in accidents for want of letting go their umbrellas!' To get rid of all impediments was his constant preoccupation, and it is impossible to imagine a freer mind than his.

*

Don't let people accuse me, as they have so often done in the cases of Dostoievsky, Goethe and Montaigne, of putting my own colour on Valéry. Nothing could be more different than our two natures, nothing more contrary than the bent of our two minds. Mine, 'naturally inclined to veneration', as Goethe said of his own, as much as Valéry's was resolutely bent on impiety, antagonistic to all accepted and unverified beliefs, resolutely sceptical (at once doubting and seeking), regardless of agreement, approval or sympathy and apparently free from all human weaknesses, vain curiosities, adventitious preoccupations, procrastinations, sentimental dallyings. To everything likely to distract him from his quest, he said 'NO!' Whereas I, if like him and in his wake, I had doubts, it was of myself. He seemed barely aware of his ascendancy. My friendship submitted to it, not without

some kicking, but the small resistance I attempted to offer him rapidly broke down and retreated in discomfiture. But one thing was clear to me, of which I never doubted – that he was always right. His scorn occasionally hurt me, at least at some points, but I acknowledged he had the right to be scornful – a right he had won in hard-fought battle. His stark, iconoclastic hammer spared nothing. And in those days I was incapable of answering his quips ironically, as I did a short time before the war at a meeting of the Radio Committee, when I had the pleasure of sitting beside him at the green table. *A propos* of some broadcast, the name of Homer came up, and Valéry bent towards me and whispered: 'Have you ever read anything more boring than the *Iliad*?' 'Yes,' I answered, 'the *Chanson de Roland*.' (If I had been a little more on the spot I should have said, *La Jeune Parque*.)

Not that, as time went on, I took him less seriously (I am almost tempted to say, 'On the contrary'), but I, on my part, had become more sure of myself. In the first days to which my memories of Paul Valéry go back, I would generally come away from our talks with a shaken mind and heart. 'He breaks your spirit with a single word,' writes Madame Teste of her husband, 'and I feel like a spoilt pot, thrown away by the potter on to his heap of failures.' Yes; that was the very thing I felt too. And she adds, 'He is hard as an angel'; and again, 'His existence seems to put in doubt everybody else's'. My admiration must have been lively indeed for my friendship not to have been too severely wounded. Nothing that I lived for seemed to have any value in his eyes, and I could not believe that he had the smallest consideration for anything I had written or wished to write. To have thought this due to any insufficiency on his part would have seemed to me presumption on mine. But he managed to show me his affection in so discreet – so almost tender a fashion – that it went to my heart more surely than any effusions. Nothing could have flattered, nothing could have touched me more, than his reliance on my literary taste,

when he called me in for consultation on some poem he had just elaborated; nothing could have shown me better that he attached importance, at any rate, to my judgment. Doubtless confidences were distasteful to him, and as he considered confessions a shocking form of exhibitionism, he disliked what I liked and what I considered it my duty to write, but he esteemed that I knew how to write and that esteem was enough for me.*

I was greatly surprised one day by the unexpected praise he gave me for an article of mine to which, I confess, I attached very little importance; it was the *Dialogue with a German*, written shortly after the other war.

'But it's mere reporting,' I protested.

'No matter!' he went on. 'Its line is perfect.'

I believe this was the only praise he ever gave me, at any rate, as far as I can remember.

May the portrait I have tried to trace of him here be one that would have pleased him!

*

Admirable as most of Valéry's poems seem to us, I am not sure that I do not prefer his prose; many of his pages, I believe, will remain among the most perfect that have ever been written in any language. Let me add at once that I know few French writers, if indeed I know any (in Germany there is Goethe), who have excelled equally in both forms. And without any doubt, it is from his prose that I expect the most salutary, the most efficacious action. For it concerns me very little that a certain number of writers modified their theory and practice of poetry to follow in his footsteps, and that a quantity of prentice hands were induced to versify in imitation of him. This turn of the helm against the current of excessive licence well deserved to be given, but it is on quite another plane and in a more veiled manner that the extraordinary benefit of Valéry's influence was exercised. This *asper contemptor deum* seems to me, above all, a master

* I am not speaking here of the Valéry of early days, but of what he became later, of what he made himself become.

liberator. No one – not even Voltaire himself, ever did more to emancipate us, to wean us from faiths, cults, beliefs. At the very moment that France, bleeding from her wounds, seems ready to fly for refuge to religious devotion and seek there consolation and salvation (as she did at the end of Louis XIV's reign, after our military reverses, when the bigotry of the age, in conjunction with his own, drove Racine to silence), Valéry's virile teaching takes on special importance, as did the example of his resistance compared with the base compliance of others. 'NO' he said obstinately, and stood, a living testimony of the unbowed and unconquerable mind.

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'But how comes it,' he would say to me, 'that men take their rest so soon? Why are they content with so little?'



WILLIAM SANSOM

EDGAR ALLAN POE

1

'A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity; these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten.'

This is an exact self-portrait of Poe. It is the face of Roderick, the decaying aristocrat of macabre possession and strange sensibility, doomed and delighting in doom, who falls, crumbling, disintegrated, into the mirror of a desolate misted tarn with the putrid walls of his weird gothicist House of Usher. Accounts, portraits, daguerreotypes leave no doubt of this self-immolation in one of Poe's most celebrated tales. And there can be traced in much of his work a relation of his own personality and experience more direct and more constant than is usual among writers.

Roderick is Edgar Poe – an æsthete of curious imagination and powerfully heightened sensibility – who struggled to voice his genius against a background of pitiful banality, of years of ill-paid hackwork in magazine offices, of genteel poverty and debt, of provincial platitude in that America of the early nineteenth century which was nearly without literature, too young and materialist to recognize easily the genius of a man with Poe's obsolescent European attitudes. But Poe never surrendered to circumstance. To the last he re-aristocracy of letters. To the end his vision persisted, his poetic

mained possessedly optimistic of creating an American integrity held firm against the middle-class odds. But in the process he killed himself. He drank – he was the dangerous kind of drunk who can keep away from drink but who after only one or two glasses develops a pitiless craving. He took opium and other drugs. These may have formed his escape route from the banalities of his background. But probably they represented more, they were the means of an imaginative acceleration, the means towards the state which is the main keynote of Poe's character, the state of *heightened sensibility*. That was above all what Poe desired. And what he had in him. He was not purely spiritual, though he praised spirituality above other attributes. He was sensually spiritual. He embarked from a material scene of some sort – a desolate gothic manor, a torchlit immurement, a sea of polar ice – upon which his senses would play and improvise their excitations with a phenomenal intensity. Very often in his tales one reads of this: 'In the meantime the morphine had its customary effect – that of endueing all the external world with an intensity of interest. In the quivering of a leaf – in the hue of a blade of grass ... there came a whole universe of suggestion ...' It is the intense objectivity, the stringing up of the nerves and the clinical awareness that precede a state of vision. Baudelaire wrote: 'Poe is a writer of the nerves – even something more – and the best I know.'

Baudelaire knew well. With remarkable enthusiasm he fulfilled the task of translating into French and popularizing in Paris all Poe's work. This work proved the seed of the great symbolist movement that was to entrance European letters for many years thereafter.

2

Death and stages in the decomposition of human flesh, exquisite landscapes of fantastic and more than real beauty, the immaculate analysis of cryptic problems – these are three surface themes recurrent in Poe's more serious prose.

Where they occur there can be sensed through the writing an acceleration of force, a possessed energy – the delight in his subject matter that so often betrays a writer's own obsessive character. Each theme has its symbolic extension: the decay of the body involves with Poe a belief that the will continues to exist, and indeed may sometimes exist so powerfully that the body's atrophy is delayed; the fabulous character of his landscapes, whether they be that iridescent Xanadu of Eleonora or the doomed gothic tapestry of Usher's house, suggests that the natural world was insufficient, that Poe's vision struggled after an adornment beyond the tedious round of nature; and lastly the analysis of those early detective stories, of the processes of fear, of strange states of the mind, of his involved cryptology, involve a desire to solve the insoluble and for once on this earth gratify that desire. For once – but all three themes have a common motor. This is a passion for *explaining* the mystery of life – not only for wonder but also for getting at the secret. The thinking human brain has always desired to penetrate the mysteries of its vision, of perpetuity and purpose. Poe differs in that he seems actually to believe that he might solve these eternal mysteries; he demonstrates the process and method of discovery – the very detail with which he writes marks a meticulous catalogue of every *fact* on the way; he believes that science and concentrated introspection will provide finally an answer. Towards the end of his life, he realized this obsession in his last large work *Eureka*, a cosmogony that 'explained the material and spiritual universe' and which Poe – by that time enfeebled in mind and body by poverty and distress and drink – believed in fact did. It was his last word.

In a rather hectic essay, D. H. Lawrence makes some interesting observations on this endemic need of Poe's. The essay becomes an invective against spiritual love in favour of purely sensual intercourse – but on the way he finds that: 'Poe is rather a scientist than an artist. He is reducing his own self as a scientist reduces salt in a crucible.' True. But

that is also what a poet may do. Poe in fact combined unusual imagination with a sort of scientific intellect. Then of *Ligeia*, Poe's favourite story, Lawrence says: 'She is his *machine à plaisir* ... What he wants to do with Ligeia is to analyse her ... till he has got her all in his consciousness ... to *know* a living thing is to kill it ... for this reason, the desirous consciousness, the SPIRIT, is a vampire.' And: '... lusting after more consciousness, more beastly KNOWING.' Truth in that too – but at the expense of all human sensibility, all elation of the human spirit. Lawrence includes the detective stories: 'Murder is not just killing. Murder is a lust to get at the very quick of life itself, and kill it – hence the stealth and the frequent morbid dismemberment of the corpse, the attempt ... to find the quick and to possess it.' Then he likens Poe to De Quincey: 'In each of them is traceable that strange lust for extreme love and extreme hate, possession by mystic violence of the other soul, or violent deathly surrender of the soul in the self ...' Partly true again – but Lawrence's own passion is confusing in so absolute a cry for the acceptance of degree.

However, a brilliance lies not only in Poe's moments of intellectual solution but when he expresses the vision, the sensuous depths of the mystery he feels. Rather than paint a picture, he seems then to weave a tapestry. It is of unimagined richness – colour, wealth, shadows tomb-dark and lights of jewelled fire are woven stitch by stitch, word by mounting word into a scene of astounding clarity and enduring fabric. The description of Eleonora's Eden: '... and together breathed a delirious bliss over the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grass. A change fell upon all things. Strange brilliant flowers, star-shaped, burst out upon the trees where no flowers had been known before. The tints of the green carpet deepened; and when, one by one, the white daisies shrank away, there sprang up, in place of them, ten by ten of the ruby-red asphodel. And life arose in our paths; for the tall flamingo, hitherto unseen, with all gay glowing birds, flaunted his scarlet plumage before us. The golden and silver

fish haunted the river, out of the bosom of which issued, little by little, a murmur that swelled, at length, into a lulling melody more divine than that of the harp of Æolus – sweeter than all save the voice of Eleonora.’ Of Prince Prospero’s final chamber: ‘... and there flows a ruddier light through the blood-coloured panes; and the blackness of the sable drapery appals; and to him whose foot falls upon the sable carpet, there comes from the near clock of ebony a muffled peal more solemnly emphatic than any which reaches *their* ears who indulged in the more remote gaieties of the other apartments.’

Round these materials is woven a further invisible web, a music of the dark spheres. The scene is invested with spiritual mist, a mist of desire, a fog of deep decaying doom. With an intense adoration of the fabulous thing that life might be – he is obsessed by death and the mutability of the flesh, the battle with the ‘conqueror Worm’. In more than half a dozen stories the theme is premature burial. Time and again his narrator, usually inverted and decadent, a recluse and a morbid visionary, always of ancient family and spending his days brooding on such as ‘the wild dominions of monastic thought and erudition’ – usually these narrators, who approximate so clearly Poe’s image of what he would like to have been, end by listening to the cries of an entombed wife, breaking open the tomb and shuddering at the dreadful sight revealed, or even enjoying these ghastly suffocations themselves. There is much in the detail of his description that smacks of the masochistic, there is much delight in the writing. But there can be heard other notes too, notes hammering on Poe’s troubled brain just as the other pale hands hammer on the confined ceiling, notes that cry of his wrestling with the idea of death, with the fascinating proposition that the fabulous beauties of his creation (or an ideal mankind) should become the blown meat of worms:

That the play is the tragedy, “Man”,
And its hero the conqueror Worm.

And from this the wishful certainty that they do not in fact die, that the spirit resists to the last, that the appearance of death itself might be illusory, and always that if the body does finally succumb then the will of the dead may live on and powerfully return.

This theme recurred persistently. But the force of his pre-occupation itself always overpowers finally the bare horror. What might otherwise seem blatant and salacious is saved by the very violence and meticulous logic with which he records it – a dark music of emotion plays that is as palpable itself as the mysterious vapour enshrouding the House of Usher. Most of Poe's heroines are of an unearthly beauty, sickly and wasting from some curious disease beyond medical knowledge. Here again Poe's own life might be cited – for he married a girl of thirteen, his cousin, who later developed tuberculosis. Contemporary accounts talk of her 'pallor', her 'raven hair'. Physically she never developed beyond her girlhood. It seems indeed that in his enfevered eyes she might have represented all the unearthly strange beauty of which he wrote. He created *Berenice* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* in the company of the child Virginia, before his marriage – during a sojourn at Baltimore when he was taking habitual opium. Virginia is differently described as a pretty round-faced smiling child; and again as showing signs of constitutional sickness: one is led to think that despite her youthful energy she already showed some of the brilliance of the disease. A few years later, *after* the tales had been written, Virginia Poe had a series of hæmorrhages that proved fatal. In 1847 she died. A terrible and pathetic episode in his distressed life, for she was the object of intense adoration; but, though no doubt she would in any case have died sooner or later, it is hard not to believe that at some subconscious level the intensity of Poe's thought was father to the wish. Just as with another poet, Rilke, who died from an obscure blood-poisoning resulting from the prick of a thorn from a rose he had plucked for a young girl. Resulting from his life-long obsession and

association of death, maidens, and roses? In both cases the coincidence is too strong, and is involved with a mind of such powerful volition, to be discarded easily.

However, Poe's territory extended further than the doomed splendours of Usher and the tomb. He sailed far into polar seas of weird beauty, he built the extraordinary domain of Arnheim, he described a plausible Benares, he dwelt with Eleonora in the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grass. Of his sea scenes in *MS found in a bottle*, Conrad said that they might have been written by an experienced seaman. But Poe never travelled – apart from an early journey to school in England. He read tremendously. His prose is filled with quotations from such varying sources as Sir Thomas Browne and Ebn Zaiat, Joseph Glanvill and Servius and the Bishop of Chichester. But more immediately influential must have been the many gothic and other ornate romances that were in vogue during his childhood – *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Italian*, *Vathek*. In *Eleanora* and in the great polar seascapes there are flavours of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* and *Ancient Mariner*. The features of De Quincey form from the mists. But above all Poe cast his vision from a matrix shaped by the German judge Hoffmann. Here there may be seen direct and most obvious similarities. From Hoffmann Poe takes the pose of the confidential narrator, the melancholy presage, the special atmosphere and setting, the clinical reasoning and the beloved introduction of learning (as Hoffmann divagates at length on all the Serapions, on the esoteric of violin manufacture). But from such a framework Poe invokes an æolian fantasy without limit; while Hoffmann remained near the humours of the earth.

Poe's desire to visit the romantic scenes of his reading must have been deep. Baudelaire claimed him as a European (though mistakenly he believed that Poe had in fact travelled abroad in Turkey and Russia); the French poet bewailed Poe's sacrifice to the public opinion of the young democracy, the 'tyranny of fools'. However, Poe was chained in his

'magazine prison' of America. He had to content himself with no more than imagination of the Rhenish desuetudes and medieval prodigality that moved so deeply his romantic nature. The Rhine, Norway, Hungary, Batavia, Venice, London and many other faraway places held the atmosphere of his tales. These occur out of all proportion to the small amount of American scenes he used – at least in his serious work. Would he have concentrated so on foreign myth if he had satisfied his desire for travel?

This brings the question – *why* did he write as he did? On the travel score, it is probable that a frustrated captivity in America accelerated the passion for the romantic background of older, more historied countries. But before agreeing easily that this must be the sole truth, or that in his macabre moments he was motivated by the need to escape from, and indeed to shock, everyday provincial life, or that the essence of his *Ligeia* group of tales was suddenly inspired by the sight of an ailing wife – one must look much deeper. Environment modulates – it does not create these fierce personal essences. Modern psychology suggests to us that, as with everyone else, Poe's real secret lies nearer the cradle. One must apply the familiar test – if ten schoolboys are caned on the knuckles, why does one develop a neurosis supposedly connected with the affair and the other nine survive and forget? Something far deeper has occurred before. The boy is already destined to fear. So the orphan Poe. His predilection for the unearthly Virginia might have been some transference of an ideal image of his lost, ethereal mother – and so on. Only a personal analysis would solve the problem, and the time is now past.

3

As a technician and stylist Poe proved ingenious. He had no use for purity of style, he was theatrical to a degree and felt keenly his audience. This shows most clearly in the mass of humorous and pseudo-scientific pieces he produced – involved and facetious posturings that embarrass,

but which he himself plainly thought of some worth. And in his serious imaginative work this theatrical note persists. That is why he was able to be the inventor of the short story in its present most ordinary sense. He knew he was telling a tale. He invented the last line revelation, for instance, in *Berenice*. With his impulse towards analysis, he invented the detective story in its modern form, thereby influencing Conan Doyle and everyone else; for instance, in the *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. He knew tale-telling well enough not to worry too much about obscuring his dénouement; he knew that the telling was the thing, with the dénouement a natural and definitive coda. The great sagas were sung and re-sung. It was their treatment that mattered. And in this, in the setting of immediate atmosphere, in the suspense of narrative, Poe was a fine artisan. Baudelaire again: 'His solemnity surprises the mind, and keeps it on the watch. We feel at once that something grave is at stake, and slowly, little by little, a history is unfurled ...'

Poe's is the interesting policy of overstatement. He leaves nothing to the imagination – except the overtones, which then play tremendously. It is like a constant drumming, this insistence on the precise fact, on the absolute description, with constant recourse to the artifices of scientific data and obscure literary quotation. The italics, the dreadfully emphatic repetitions resound like the drops of a water torture. And he goes to all ends to remind the reader that he is reading no fiction, he is reading *fact*. (So, in fact, he almost is.) The reader's doubt is constantly foreseen and diverted with a confidential phrase, an 'aside'. And yet, with all this, the drumming is so consistent that the tales appear spare and economical. Interesting too, is the sudden appearance of a startlingly modern phrase. In any case, Poe wrote what was to sound modern long after the turn of the century. But in these present days of surreal shock and rubberized phrase, it is odd to find written before the last mid-century such images as: 'I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it.'

Such an eye is a motive for murder. And: 'I saw the lips of the black-robed judges. They appeared to me white, whiter than the sheet ...'

Baudelaire said: 'No man has told with greater magic the *exception* of human life ... the order of the curiosities of convalescence, the close of seasons charged with enervating splendours ... where the south wind softens and distends the nerves, like the chords of an instrument ... absurdity installing itself in the intellect, governing it with crushing logic; hysteria usurping the place of will. ...' Though this speaks again of the essence of Poe's subject, there is a hint of technique in the reference to his 'crushing logic'.

The analyses of mental processes – fear, or vertigo, or his favourite 'perversity' – had an authentic manner and were in many cases advanced for their period. But it was how these analyses were recorded that gave them their 'crushing' quality. Each perception, each extension into theory was annotated in the greatest detail; the description of a minute's fear inflated that minute into dreadful hour-long insistence – one is reminded of the extension of time during some such moment of tautened nerves as a motor accident. Then there is the intrinsic richness of his style – the choice of coloured words, the emphasis on the sensual. Rhythm he used strongly, and the sinuous sequence of dashes, the mounting broken sentences of soliloquy. Much of this is perfect of its kind – though for one who pleaded for word-music in poetry he shows sometimes a strangely awkward, deaf ear.

However, these ingenuities of technique and the whole affair of presentation led him often into trouble. Just as in his subject-matter the poetic quest was not always pure, but vitiated by a genuine morbidity, by a personal excitement at the idea of torture and death and doom, and by a desire to startle his public – just so a vast amount of his work was over-styled, too full of tricks and postures, to be taken at all seriously. This may have been the result of a pressing journalistic need to turn out material for money. But there is a feeling in much of this inferior stuff that marks his own regard

for it. He fancied himself as a humorist, but his humorous tales are over-involved, tricky, facetious. They are loaded with puns and false scholastics, ponderous argumentation and leaden fancifying in the most embarrassing taste.

But sometimes into his more inspired work there creeps the same over-decoration. References to and quotations from obscure literary works appear too often. This is Poe rolling the tastes of romantic scholarship on his tongue – and on the defensive, trying to urge upon the readers his personal scholarship. Then there is an insistence on favourite words and phrases like ‘lustrum’ and ‘*a posteriori* or inductive’. These are savage pets that yap and snap at the body of an otherwise beautiful paragraph. It is the temptation of the schoolboy with his clean sheet of essay paper – writing with love the title and his name, emblazoning these with volutes and red ink, loving them too much in his immature feeling for words and in the excitement of impressing them on fresh paper and the world of readership. But still – they are defects infrequent in the best of his work; their occasional appearance can be forgiven – more particularly if one remembers the flourishes of the age in which they were written.

4

Edgar Poe was born on the 19th January, 1809. His father was of Irish descent. His parents were both actors. He was orphaned at two years. A Mr Allan, a Scotsman of Richmond in Virginia, took him into his home. At the age of six he was given five years' schooling in England, at Stoke Newington. At seventeen he entered the University of Virginia; a year later his foster-father withdrew him after Poe had become involved in heavy gambling debts. Soon after, he left Allan's house, went to Boston and published his first verses – *Tamerlane* (at eighteen years). He then entered the Army, and rose to be regimental sergeant-major (at the age of twenty). Followed a reconciliation with Allan, who helped

him to enter the Military College at West Point. Six months later he was dismissed for indisciplinatory behaviour.

By this time he had developed the character and habits that were to be his for the rest of his life. He had started to drink, possibly to drug; he had entered into a state of what was to be chronic indebtedness. Yet he had been able to live a very regular life in the Army for two years. He was capable of such bouts of regularity; he desired regularity throughout his life. Possibly the parsimony of his foster-father had first tempted him to gamble – certainly he had grandiose ideas and an imagination that resented any meagre manner of living; whereas this could be contained under army discipline, university life would have tempted him to dramatize himself. His person was attractive, and always, even at times of hardest poverty, he contrived a seedy elegance of dress. His feet and hands were feminine, but his body male and powerful; he was a prodigious athlete. At the University of Virginia he had taken high honours in Latin and French; he had three books of verses published – but, of course, with no financial success. Thereafter two strong impulses were to conflict in him. The desire to lead a regular, economically sound life; and a need to excel intellectually and æsthetically – of which he showed every capability – and to satisfy in living his romantic aspirations. But he was already destitute. To earn even a little money by writing in the America of those days was a slow, galling business. The attempt was made, but the vicious conflict of his fancy and of his impatience with mediocrity was to drive him continually back to where he started—through pride, drink, and a profligacy of emotion that various newspaper offices could not sustain. He was always ashamed of his bouts, he liked to envisage himself as the ‘family man’. And this more particularly after he had entered into a new relationship, one that was to remain a strong and constant association all his life. For in March of his twenty-second year he came to Baltimore and settled on his aunt, Mrs Clemm, who was thereafter to mother him. She was, too,

the mother of Virginia, whom Poe married. He developed a feeling of responsibility towards this household; at times he fulfilled it; then as sadly spoiled all his efforts.

He now started writing short stories, and published several during the course of the next year, 1832. Then with *A MS found in a bottle* he won a story prize (£50) offered by the *Baltimore Saturday Visitor*. This was an outstanding inducement to take literature seriously as a career; here was a firm recognition of his gifts. He contributed stories to the *Southern Literary Messenger*, among which was *Berenice*. He returned to his native Richmond, to a post on that magazine (\$10 a week, but it was regular). During his co-editorship circulation was multiplied five times; so also were the circulations of other magazines on which he worked later. He was a gifted editor. To the end his ambition was to edit his own magazine – but the finance was never forthcoming. And on this first paper trouble soon arose. He was too often drunk and had to leave. Thus after two years, at twenty-six, he returned to Baltimore and the *Clemms*. There, secretly, he married his thirteen-year-old cousin Virginia. Thereafter attempts, failures, removals. New York. Philadelphia. It was here that he published *Ligeia*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and his first collection of stories (now at the age of thirty years); and here he remained, making some reputation for himself, and editing *Graham's Magazine*, until his thirty-third year. During this time he wrote much literary criticism, exercised himself in analytical subjects and in cryptography, and from this alembic produced *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and for all time the detective story.

In 1842 a tragic circumstance upset this almost settled life. Virginia burst a blood vessel while singing. She nearly died. Poe suffered the pain and sorrow of bereavement. Again and again the hæmorrhage occurred, the tuberculosis took its severe hold. Poe's life became an agony of suspense – perhaps too of a dark fascination. He drank more than ever. He had to relinquish his editorial duties. The family

again began its wanderings. It is terrifying to note, quite apart from the other uncanny coincidences of Poe's macabre vision and his wife's sickly state, that the circumstance of her first hæmorrhage was identical with that of the heroine of one of Hoffmann's best-known stories – *The Cremona Violin*. She too was a singer with an aura of fabulous beauty. She too laboured under 'an organic weakness of the chest'. As she sang 'her blushes gathered into two dark red spots on her pale cheeks'. She too died in song. This – written years before Poe ever saw Virginia.

Small successes followed in New York – but they were never more sustained. In his thirty-sixth year he finished and published *The Raven*, which suddenly brought him a wide popularity. He published a collection of his tales that actually brought him a royalty. At last he obtained control of a magazine – the *Broadway Journal*. But his way of living grew wilder than ever, all sense of order declined with this domestic distress and deeper drinking. The magazine failed. At thirty-seven he and the family removed to a cottage outside New York. Virginia was plainly dying. There was no money, little fuel and food, few clothes left. An incident here gives a pathetic and touching picture of these last years of the visionary poet, and of the homely atmosphere against which his degradation and his brilliance were set. With several friends one day Poe strolled out into the woods. A contest of leaping was proposed. Poe excelled – but in doing so burst his shoes. Poe stopped shocked. His friends, feeling the force of tragedy, left. Later one of these returned to the cottage – to find Poe crumpled and silent, with Mrs Clemm saying, in motherly dismay: 'Eddie! How did you burst your gaiters? Do answer Muddie.'*

Virginia died in 1847. Poe was thirty-eight. Thenceforward he occupied himself with his long cosmogony, *Eureka*. In presenting this to his publishers, he showed signs of insanity, the obsessed gleam of a man who really believed he

* I am indebted to Mr. Edward Shanks' biography (Edgar Allan Poe – Macmillan) for pointing this incident.

had explained the world. A little later, he wrote *The Bells*. In October of 1849 he was in Baltimore City, drunk. A band of electioneers found him, gave him more and more drink, put voting papers in his hand and toured him round the voting booths. He was found later by friends. But this bout had proved too much. Four days later, on 8th October, 1849, in his fortieth year, he died.



JOHN LEHMANN

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS AN ESCAPER

Over the mantelpiece in a room where I often work, there is a pencil drawing of James Joyce by Augustus John, one of a famous set. It is a very fine drawing indeed, and holds the eye by its flair and vitality, by the direct æsthetic satisfaction it gives. It is a balm to the mind when some problem with which one is wrestling refuses to yield, and one lifts one's gaze away from the scribbled papers in front of one to its bold and lucid statement.

And yet, below the surface satisfaction, it poses a problem as teasing as any that is ever likely to come the way of a critic, or anyone interested in the motives and ideals that underlie the life-pattern of men of genius. The high forehead, slightly furrowed as in argument or inquiry, the thin, straight lips, the long and rather obstinate chin, suggest at once a vigorous and combative intellect, remind one indeed that Joyce's whole work is a triumph of intellectual energy and sustained will-power. Open the *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, and it hits you in the eye at once; grapple with a few pages of *Finnegan's Wake*, and you can hardly fail to be convinced that the mind which created that extraordinary prose must be as uncommon as that of a Senior Wrangler. But how did the man who wrote the former come to write the latter? That is the mystery: how the lucidity, the passion, the quick feeling for character and dramatic effect that Joyce displayed so brilliantly at the outset of his career, flowered – perhaps seeded would be the juster word – into the vast obscurities, the fantastically perverse ingenuities that need almost a lifetime of patient study to elucidate and appreciate?

I can think of no case in the whole of literature that can be compared with Joyce's. Has any other writer so completely changed not only his style, but also the very words, the language he used? The later novels of Henry James show, indeed, a richly foliated evolution in style from the starting-point of *Roderick Hudson*, or *The American*. James grows subtler, more passionately tireless in pursuit of the slightest nuances of atmosphere, feeling, and moral distinction, and more long-winded in the bad sense of the word as well; but the author of *The Wings of the Dove* is recognizably the same author, he is still interested in creating the same illusion of reality, and if his sentences have become so luxuriantly more qualified and complex, they only exaggerate a tendency that was always there; above all there is no refashioning of the basic tools of a writer's craft – no invention of language itself. So with Mallarmé: though the art may become more arcane as the artist abandons himself to his morbid æsthetic cravings – and by that I mean that he grows less and less interested in the necessities of communication – there are certain conventions he never rejects; the chief one being the French vocabulary into which he was born.

Shakespeare, perhaps, is the nearest parallel; for Shakespeare, living at a time when the English language was still in process of creation, or was recreating itself, was continually inventing words and phrases – how many it is difficult for us to tell, as his contemporaries have not left us any observations on the subject. In addition to this, towards the end of his working life his thought became deeper, more allusive and more daring in the leaps it took in the course of an argument, so that some of the speeches and soliloquies in *Cymbeline* or *A Winter's Tale* first of all dazzle us by their brilliance then leave us bewildered about their precise meaning. Shakespeare travelled a long way, in style, in thought, in language in the two decades between *Love's Labour's Lost* and Prospero's renunciation; and yet even this evolution – leaving aside all questions of relative æsthetic value – is not

so rapid, so complex or so strange as the evolution of James Joyce.

The drawing by John does certainly provide a clue: for one of its most striking felicities is the way it suggests Joyce's *blindness*. It would, I think, be rash to claim that the gradual failure of sight, of visual appreciation of the external world, was entirely responsible for the evolution of Joyce's style; it is even just possible that both phenomena spring from one ulterior cause, hidden in the deeper recesses of the will and temperament; nevertheless it is undoubtedly true that Joyce as a writer grows more and more preoccupied with what goes on inside the mind, and that his genius, like an excavator digging ever farther away from the daylight and the concrete daylight world, descends from one internal level of consciousness to another, even darker – to that level within sound of the subterranean streams which boil up only rarely but with incalculable force, as the psychologists tell us, to disrupt or fertilize the surface world. That is the progression of James Joyce from *Dubliners* and the *Portrait* through *Ulysses* to *Finnegan's Wake*, from Stephen Dedalus with his so clearly defined home background, hopes, fears and intellectual prejudices, to H. C. Earwicker, a phantasmal symbol of the universal subconscious in which all cultures and all languages merge and all passions swirl together without distinction or controlling order. *Finnegan's Wake* is the work of a man to whom night had become more important than day.

In a sense, of course, as critics have pointed out before now, it is all foretold in the *Portrait*; not only the self-imposed exile from Ireland, but the æsthetic conceptions that were to give birth to the two most uncomfortable masterpieces of our time. 'I will try to express myself,' cries Stephen to his friend Cranly, 'in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use, silence, exile and cunning.' And in an earlier argument with his friends he says: 'When the soul of a man is born in this country there are

nets flung at it to hold it back from the light. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.'

And with the same passion and the steel-hard force of will that he endowed Stephen with, Joyce himself flew by the narrow-meshed net of his country's religion, his country's romantic national legend, and the language into which he had been born. What is important to notice about these ruthless and absolute renunciations is that they were not conversions; he did not put Protestantism in the place of Catholicism, he did not allow another country to adopt him, as so many intellectuals turning their backs on the jigsaw-puzzle walls of Europe have allowed America to adopt them, he did not write in another language as Conrad learnt to write in English; his aim was to fly by all religions, all nationalities, all languages. *Ulysses* is his declaration of escape from the first two; and *Finnegan's Wake* from the last.

Independence from anything that may confine the free play of thought and imagination is vital to an artist; but in the peculiar and extravagant form in which Joyce pursued it with such violence of will, it had its terrible dangers. It is likely that he recognized them; it would be typical of his uncommon make-up to do so – and to defy them. I do not see what other interpretation can be put on the outburst with which Stephen concludes his argument with Cranly: 'I will tell you also what I do not fear. I do not fear to be alone or to be spurned for another or to leave whatever I have to leave. And I am not afraid to make a mistake, even a great mistake, a lifelong mistake and perhaps as long as eternity too.'

The bitter longings of Stephen Dedalus were the plans that James Joyce carried through to the end. He escaped from Ireland, and from Ireland's religion; but he never *freed* himself from them. He created works that were cosmopolitan in an entirely new sense; and yet the scene of the action in *Ulysses* is Dublin, and in *Finnegan's Wake* it is still Dublin, though more insubstantial and only fleetingly glimpsed.

Dublin was the *omphalos* of his world to the end. No cosmopolitan writer has ever shown such an attachment to one place – and that one place his own home. And in his escape from Ireland's religion he did not take refuge in an all too civilized cynicism or a mystique of the aristocratic virtues, an internationalism of the cultivated mind. *The Portrait* reveals to us how deep was his need to put something in the place of the Catholic vision of the universe; he had been, one feels, so conditioned by the carefully constructed order of Jesuit teaching, that order, a different order, but as exacting and elaborate as possible, was what he found he had to create for himself – not freedom. *Ulysses* is a monument of obsessive learning, of layer upon layer of symbolical parallels and allusive patterns, and his commentators have reverently pointed out to us the innumerable references to ancient religion and magic buried in it. Faust himself could not chalk out his mystic circles with more passion than James Joyce prepared a metaphysical scaffolding for his thinking once the Jesuit props had been torn away. And yet all this elaboration and erudition, the delight of the high-priests of his memory, is almost totally irrelevant to the value of *Ulysses* as a work of art. What is true of *Ulysses* is true also of *Finnegan's Wake* in an even greater degree. Beside the great artist, another spirit, a mixture of Holofernes and Glendower, prepares his boringly ingenious examination papers and intones his abracadabras, and one begins to wish that Joyce had not been so ruthlessly determined to risk that mistake 'as long as eternity'.

Considered in cold blood, when one's excitement and amazement at the incredible virtuoso display have died away, *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*, which are certainly works of genius, are also staggering examples of misdirected genius – as Blake's Prophetic Books were. The pyramid of literature has grown huger since Blake's day, and the heirs of a civilization facing the possibility of absolute annihilation have become at the same time poorer in the leisure and concentration needed to climb that pyramid. How happy one might

be, in the millennium, with no worries about food or money and no bureaucratic persecution, with all the advantages of science and none of its monstrous terrors, to devote seven years of tranquil study and appreciation to *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. As it is, though many passages will remain in the anthologies, like Blake's Prophetic Books they are likely to be read in the future only by specialist or research-endowed students, the lover of the recondite for the sake of the recondite, and those rare artists who are always searching for the stimulus to new technical achievement. There is nothing second-rate about the ambition behind these stupendous projects, nor about the intellect and the will that carried them through. It is indeed only when one has grasped the tremendous intellectual and artistic equipment of James Joyce, when one has understood how much of the literature of our day has some blood from *Ulysses* in its veins, when one has been bewitched by the author's own reading of the famous passages from *Finnegan's Wake*, so luckily preserved for us on gramophone recordings, that one can properly appreciate the tragedy of the compulsions that led him to pour all those gifts into such forbidding and unwieldy bottles. The pedantry, the monotony, the mumbo-jumbo, the wanton surrender to the crossword puzzle part of the mind – these also sprang from the 'silence, exile and cunning'. James Joyce did indeed escape from all the bars that seemed to be imprisoning his youthful genius, but the attempt was as mad as Rimbaud's, and as in Rimbaud's case the natural order of things had its revenge and saw to it that the escaper himself built a new, perhaps a more terrible prison round his freedom.

THE LIVING MOMENT

*

ALAN ROSS

FROM A CORSICAN NOTE-BOOK

ARIADNE

The sea road north-west from Ajaccio leads up past the cemetery, along tree-lined avenues with the sea on one side, the *maquis*-covered mountain on the other. Half-hourly buses race the distance to the beaches, run by two companies, the Service Ajacienne and Sciaretti Frères. The buses are blue and yellow, the steering-wheel on the right-hand side in one bus, and on the left-hand side in the other.

After five kilometres the beaches begin – Ariadne, Palm Beach, Marinella. Ariadne is quiet and select, Palm Beach a little gayer but with no cover, and Marinella is *chic* with a dance band and lit-up raft and American cocktail bar where till dawn there is drinking and dancing.

The sand is finely cut and nearly white; the sea salty and buoyant, a green blue under-blackened with rocks. Small fish bite at the feet like time, the tideless water is transparent and enlarging, the body a negative exposed under a green slide of sea. From the hills above the thyme-filled scent of scrub floats over; the cacti crouch like boxers with soft green gloves.

And all day the sun burns from a similar sky, a solitary puff of cloud on the horizon like a gun-burst. Then spiralling in the sun the mail plane comes in circling over the airfield.

In the afternoon a man lies on a bench in a grove of trees by the water, singing.

Unnoticed the girls, slender and dark like olives, stretch out on the sand below, listening.

Over from Marinella the sound of the piano comes faintly like a soft reply, vulgar, sweet, derivative.

The fruit that is bitten into is soft with mould. The native singing lapses into desiccated jazz, unnatural and harsh. The predicament of two alien worlds balances precariously in the music and falls over on the wrong side.

The klaxon of the Sciaretti Frères bus breaks over the high tenor voice, the hens and chickens run like refugees into the blank gas-mask stare of the green hillside flowers.

But along the road, pink and white over the water, flowers nestle in stiffly trained bushes, upright as girls. The air is drenched with the yellow creeper from Barbicaja, and with sea holly. The sand is pitted with red coral.

Higher, on the hillsides, the *maquis* scorched by the sun fans up in great sacrificial pyres.

PORTO VECCHIO

History ran dry here, a stronghold built overlooking the bay almost cut off by the hills. The whole port, the commanding position, the wide harbours promised enormous development, but somewhere the imagination gave out, with houses half-finished, the railway petering into marshes, the projected jetties rotting like poisoned arms.

The effort of cultivation was arrested, a gesture frozen in mid-air, and over everything the deserted atmosphere of an abandoned town hung. The few people in the street sa about on dirty pavements as if under some terrible sentence. Everyone else had gone into the mountains, the only refuge from the swamps, the malaria, and the decay.

In a semicircle round the town, collapsing battlements poised over the filthy green of the gulf and beyond them clumps of cork and olive trees reached high up into the mountains. But in the town the atmosphere of defeat had undermined the imagination. Rotten fruit lay about on the pavements.

Down by the sea wall a solitary sailing boat with a pale

blue sail idled on the windless water. On the jetty naked fisherboys chased one another into the sea, and under water grappled continuously. From a few wooden shacks washing hung out, and silent women sat nursing their babies on their verandas over the water.

The shore was littered with dead fish, their mouths bared in the look of soldiers come upon dead in a battlefield, and round about rusty steel hoops lay by huge piles of cork stored like shell-cases the whole length of the beach. Anchors, washed-up boats, gutted hulls, and huge red buoys straddled the green saucer of sea, paraphernalia no longer wanted; a few yards into the water a charred chair and a rusty table sat waiting for an occupant, macabre and eternal.

From the marshes a choir of cicadas and frogs kept up an orchestra of noise that went on day and night. When a stone was lifted, lizards ran out into crumbling fields of timber that were strewn about, refugees from some sin on their conscience, like people whose gaze could never bear to be met for fear of something being found out.

Here the sin had been found out, the plot exposed, the accomplices punished, yet over the descendants the crime still hung, the curse heavy in the blood. Years back the effort had been made, the struggle to be free, prosperous, alive; but with defeat the urge had snapped, the imagination sunk back into the marshland of despair, fever, futility.

In white cones on the soft edge of the swamp, salt lay stacked, tiny pyramids bright as chalk, like the blocks scattered round fields during war to prevent the landing of aeroplanes. The salt engine beat away in a pulse continuously — one felt if it stopped, life would stop too.

TO OGIASTRO

The narrow road to Ogliastro ran up the steep ravine between the two headlands. The houses, cream, pale green, pink, propped themselves up round a miniature church, no bigger from the bay than children's bricks. In the ravine a dark multi-coloured strip of vegetation, like the hair down

a man's stomach, exaggerated the bare scrub on either side, marked only with the white ribbon of the road and the pylons that disappeared over the hill.

A signpost, almost withered away like a paralysed arm, pointed the way up the path, with the village itself hidden by the thread of the hill. Glittering in the sun the white rounded domes of family tombs – La Famille Peleschi 1932, Famille Longo 1919 – with effigies of the Virgin wreathed in rusty ferns faced one another in eternal complacency. Over the smooth surfaces lizards with purple and light green skins skidded like racing cars.

Farther up, vines lay in fields of leaf on the higher side of the hill; on the other, fig trees hung over the loose wall, the pale yellow fruit hanging in earrings down from the thin branches. From the ravine, streams of water poured down amongst exotic broad-leaved plants, the ferns splaying out under overhanging rocks, inset like the expensive garden ornamentation of a night club – with, instead of orchids, white bell-shaped flowers stretching pale necks into the water, and dark green lichen and cress closing over them.

Behind the fig trees, peaches, hanging like coloured lamps on a Christmas tree, lolled unreal and indolently golden with smudges of rouge emerging under the chaperoning leaves. Across the rough-stoned path, heavy, kimono'd butterflies, orange and russet, flopped from wall to branch. Through everything the submerged silver of the waterfall glistened like a thermometer.

At the top, under the distant velvet skyline, the cross of the village was pinned like a butterfly drugged on its setting board. There was no one in the streets; the windows of the houses were all barred; the church was shut.

It was as though constant living so close to this isolated profusion of plant and perfume, fruit and water, had been too much of an excess for the population, and yearly for the good of their souls they left their homes.

All round on the mountains the slopes were bare and stony. Half-way down the ravine the waterfall ran out.

LE ROI JÉRÔME

After dinner the fashionable thing to do was to go and drink coffee in the *Roi Jérôme*. Between nine and ten every evening all the beach girls, the black marketeers, the near-gangsters, and a few others came in and sat about on plush chairs in a back room, while a bored young man in a canary pullover played very good jazz, a cigarette dropping ash up and down the keys, as he looked about the room through the gauze of cigarette smoke. It was the nearest approach in Corsica to the world of the American film – conscientiously but rather badly aped.

All round the room the girls draped themselves, showing ribbons of brown thigh, and pecking genteelly at their coffee-cups. But the remarkable thing was that hardly anyone drank alcohol – in about an hour and a half, with about thirty people constantly there, the waiter said he served only three liqueurs and two Cinzanos. For the rest, people drank coffee, brightly coloured *sirops* – with frightful watered-down flavours of peppermint or raspberry – and *pastis*. Throughout Corsica, in fact, apart from the ordinary wine they drank in their own houses, the people seemed to drink very little. Only on Saints' Days, by some curious alignment of religion with intoxication, was there any evidence of alcohol being drunk with the idea of it producing some sort of stimulation.

But the pianist never for a moment stopped playing languid, sentimental American tunes, all slightly hotted-up, and the dark, greasy-haired men in two-coloured striped jerseys lounged about on the chairs smoking or playing pelota, and paying very little attention to the music or the girls. Bits of paper were brought out with figures on them, hands waved pointing out this and that – all the various bits of black market fiddling which together produced a reasonable income and which was spent in Marseilles or Tunis, but never in Corsica.

In the outer room, at a chromium bar stuck up with

pictures of French film stars, a pallid middle-aged woman, blonde hair streaked with white done up in a bun, sat swinging grotesquely naked legs – the nakedness accentuated by the unsunburnt, flabby flesh – and smoked in long, slow puffs from an enamel cigarette-holder.

Nobody took any notice of her, but the fantastic, exaggerated performance – a mixture of the du Barry and Mata Hari – went on as if a thousand eyes were fixed on every gesture. She wore royal blue trousers, just too long for shorts and a shade too short for the contemporarily smart three-quarter lengths. Nightly, the barman said, she came in and sat there, one hand on hip, a simulated glazed look surveying the room through half-shut eyelids, and the smoke uncurling up against the pink and blue frieze of streamlined girls that stretched round the walls. But never, he said, with any result. By the bar the proprietor, a fat, completely bald little man with a face like Sidney Greenstreet, meticulously jotted down each coffee and each *sirop* in columns on a huge sheet of paper stretched out on a table.

‘You like guitars?’ he said. ‘This music is no good’ – and he made a contemptuous gesture towards the inner room where boogie-woogie was drumming out – ‘but the customers like it. You are English, yes?’ he went on; ‘I was once imprisoned by the Italians as an English spy.’ He burst into a deep, throaty gurgle, his face squeezing up like a baby’s. ‘During the war the English come by night’ – he made repeated parachute gestures, gurgling away happily with all the coffee ticking forgotten – ‘and I help them with food. The Italians ask me if I’m French and I say No! Corsican’ – that was his favourite remark, for he had a loathing for the French and a complete belief in the individuality of his own nationality, that was almost unique – ‘but they took me off to the camp with the English. Ah! the *lucquois*’ – he made savage, contemptuous gestures, grotesque on his crumpled-up, child’s face – ‘they are no use. In a few days I was back up here.’ He laughed, clapping his thigh with his podgy little hands, then suddenly became serious. ‘But I will take you

to the guitars, only a little café for the people, you know, but the music is beautiful, you will see.' He ticked off two more coffees laboriously, then threw away the pencil. 'Come,' he said, 'I will show you the real Corsica, not like this place,' and he screwed up his face like a schoolboy taking castor oil.

He led the way down a few back streets to where a chink of light lit up a small interior of a bar, with three or four tables out in front of it and a girl and two men playing cards inside. Sitting round the entrance a few figures moved behind the glowing ends of their cigarettes in the darkness.

But King Jérôme, as they called him, was well known, for as soon as they caught sight of him they all got up guiltily from the pavement and went inside. By the time he had ordered cherry brandies, two of them had drawn up chairs and were tuning up on their guitars – good-natured, fine-eyed boys who smiled at him while they played as though they were humouring a peculiarly childish whim.

When they began playing he sat with his head between his hands, the light shining on the huge, salmon-coloured dome, and gazed at the guitar with a look of drugged ecstasy – the sort of mellifluous, faraway absorption that mediums put on in a trance. Then a boy began to sing. The music began with the harsh plaintive, almost epileptic choke in the throat that is common to so much Oriental chanting – very sad, with an overtone of hysteria about it, then falling away into a tender, soft lament. The boy who sang was exquisitely beautiful, but very self-conscious, laughing all the time as if it all was really rather absurd and suddenly breaking into tangos which made King Jérôme very petulant. '*Pas Espagnol, pas Americain, pas Français, mais Corse !*' he kept bursting out, his reverie abruptly shattered. 'If you don't sing properly, in Corsican,' he said, 'I'm going back to my bar.'

So they started off again, solemnly serious, a few bars of some grief-laden love song while the little fat figure rearranged itself into its position of surrender and drank in

the delicate, sweet tones of the serenade. The boy's voice rose and fell, expressive and gentle, while the dark eyes behind smiled all the time as though telling a nursery rhyme and then suddenly, with the spell at its height and the slopped figure entranced, the guitars broke into ragtime again, unconsciously almost, and the boy started laughing. The little man got up and banged the table with his fists, hopelessly. Then, giving the boy up as a bad job, he called out to the girl who was playing cards. 'Will you sing a little, Madame?' he said. 'I have some friends.' The girl was very pretty and smiled obligingly in a mechanical sort of way. She was the wife of the proprietor of the café – it was called *Au Son des Guitares Bar* – who was one of the young men playing the guitars, indolent and pleasantly fleshy. 'Certainly,' she said. 'What would you like?'

'Anything,' he said, 'but in Corsican, please, please.' The little voice wailed out to her imploringly, the hands stretched out as if registering emotion in a silent film.

She began to sing, a hard, strident voice which she projected straight in front of her down some imaginary microphone, at the same time going on with the game of cards. It was the same sort of tune as before, a mixture of grief and love, rising to sudden moments of frenzy – but she sang it absolutely without expression, so that in its indifferent hardness it acquired a particular brittle sexuality – as though all the time love was being made to her under the table but she was purposely taking no notice.

At the end of the song the fat, doll's figure got up and thanked her, beaming through his glasses, satisfied that something had been completed at last. He was all hardness and ruthlessness except in these two things – being a Corsican and wallowing in the sentiment of the national music, and on the subject of having helped the English during the war. Everything, it became obvious, could be got from him by indulging him in talking about the war and in playing Corsican music.

As soon as it was finished he became the business man

again. 'I must go back to work,' he said with distaste outside, and already the thump of the piano in the *Roi Jérôme* could be heard coming over the dark streets, with its atmosphere of plush chairs, of smoke wreathing up round the pastel wallpaper and bored girls lying about exposing their stomachs and thighs.

He screwed up his face again and spat. 'What filthy music! All the fault of the Americans,' he said, then burst into his guttural chuckle. 'But six or seven of them were shot here every night. Bang! Bang!' He stopped in the street, laughed, as if the memory of it was too much for him.

'Oh! yes,' he went on, 'they think they buy everything, but bang! bang! they buy that too,' and he bent up double laughing. 'They are worse than the French,' he said, 'much worse.'



KEITH B. POOLE

THE GIFT

It was cool and pleasant under the one tall tree, on the brilliant grass, after the long hot day on the road from Tunis. The water was boiling on the small tommy cooker and Dave attentively, patiently crouching by the brew can ready to put the tea in at the precise moment. Dave was one of those invaluable, indefatigable men who always made tea. No matter how dangerous the situation, how short the stay, how inconvenient the position, Dave made tea.

He had, as I remembered, 'brewed up' all through the desert war, to and fro across Africa from El Agheila to Tobruk and back to El Alamein, and all the way on to Tunis. He never asked a reason – it was automatic. We stopped in convoy. That meant tea. So tea we had. When I say we I mean only those two or three selected men he considered, though he only once mentioned it, his 'chinas'.

He was now watching the can like a gull for herrings, inscrutable, motionless, squatting on his haunches and oblivious of everything else; so that he did not see the two approaching figures.

'Hallo, Dave, we've got a party. Visitors for tea,' I called out.

'Have we?' asked Dave, not looking up. 'They'll be darned unlucky then.'

I sat up, interestedly watching the strange figures slowly coming towards us. One of them was a giant of six and a half feet; the other a dwarf of four feet. They trod slowly, holding each other's hands like silent, pensive lovers wandering along shaded lanes at eventide. Both wore long striped gowns reaching to their ankles, and curious flat velvet caps.

In silence they passed behind and round our truck, lingered

for a moment to stare at it, then moved across to the fire and opposite Dave, where, still holding hands, they squatted easily, effortlessly on their hams, their quick, warm, bright eyes studying like birds every movement Dave made.

'Tchay up,' he shouted suddenly, alert and eager, swinging the blackened can of tea from the cooker and putting another one filled with water on the fire he had made, for he only ever used a cooker in an emergency and when a fire was impracticable.

'Seen our guests, Dave?'

'Guests?' He looked round quickly. 'Strewth – coupler wogs.'

'Not wogs, Dave,' I corrected.

'Not wogs? Well, they ain't from my part of the world. Nor yourn.'

'No, that's true. They're Goums.'

'They're what?' he echoed, staring at me incredulously.

'Goums.'

'Goums? Wot the 'ell are Goums when they're at 'ome?'

'They come from Morocco, I believe.'

'Where's that?'

'North Africa. Opposite Spain,' I added vaguely.

'Well, wot's that but wogs? Anyway, they ain't English.'

'They're a curious crowd; deadly fighters. Jerry is scared stiff of them. They love fighting and they only use knives.'

Dave listened carefully, still holding the steaming can in his hand. Then, after a pause. 'I believe every word you say, chum, but as far as I'm concerned they're wogs.' He paused again. 'An' I 'ate wogs. 'Ere, let's 'ave yer mug.' He began to pour out the tea.

The two Goums sat there like gowned buzzards, the smaller man's hand still clasped in the brown palm of the giant's. Only their quick, interested eyes moved in their motionless heads on their motionless bodies.

'Tchay?' I said, raising my mug in their direction. They grinned warmly, it was like sunshine reflected in polished mahogany. 'Kwise,' I added in Arabic. They sat grinning,

the light dancing in their eyes. '*Kwise kateer*,' I said again. They still, unmoving, smiled.

'Is that wog language?' asked Dave. 'If it is they ain't understood nuffin. Did you say they was from Morocco?'

'I believe so,' I answered. 'Yes, I'm sure, French Morocco.'

'French Morocco? Well, why talk to 'em in Arabic? Why not try 'em in French? Ask 'em wot they want in their own lingo. Like me talkin' to your sister in 'Industanny.'

'Tea - *bong* - *tray bong*,' I ventured after this rebuke, not having used the language since I left school and never even before that with proficiency.

The tall Goum nodded, still grinning, and as I repeated my apparent success he nodded more vigorously.

'I think you must be right, Dave, but I don't know any more. Have to wait for old Dick.'

'Where's 'e gone?'

'He went off up to the village to see if he could find some wine.'

'Ave to wait then. We ain't in no 'urry an' yer wouldn't say they was.'

We drank our tea contentedly, without criticism. It was, as usual, good, as if it had been made in a pot at home and not thrown like a magic potion into a can of hot water.

Suddenly, over the rim of my mug, I saw the giant Goum grinning again and pointing excitedly at the steep, green draped hill away on our left. It must have been about a thousand feet high, almost vertical, on the brown top of which stood what appeared to be a battered, ruined shell of a former castle.

He said something unintelligible to the small man and they sprang on their hands and toes as we used to do in the physical training course as recruits, only they did not gasp with prolonged strain as we did. The giant, leaning all his weight on his left hand and rigid arm, waved his right hand towards the hill.

'Boum! Boum!' he uttered.

'Boum! Boum!' echoed the little man, drawing his knees with a swift movement into his stomach as a frog does when preparing to jump. Both men began to crawl forward stealthily, grunting and 'boum-bouming' as they moved.

'Wot in 'ell's the game?' The puzzled Dave glanced at me anxiously.

'God knows - I've got it,' I cried. 'They're telling us about their attack on that hill. They must be attached to those Free French we saw coming into the village. Yes, look, they're pointing at it again.'

'Look like a coupler toads' oppin' about a field,' answered Dave with scorn. Then suddenly he uttered a high-pitched, slowly falling whistle between his teeth, realistically imitating a whining shell.

The two Goums fell flat immediately and lay still, heads burrowed in the crooks of their arms. Then the giant sat up, nodding his head vigorously. He ducked down again, the smile passing swiftly from his face and replaced by a cruel, pitiless stare of hate.

'Boum!' he said again. 'Boum! Boum!'

It reminded me strangely of animals performing in a circus, yet they showed no signs of trained apathy; they were living all over again those vivid moments of the attack. Dave, warmed up now to the meaning of a charade he had been helped to guess, whistled again and ducked down. They did the same. Dave imitated a machine-gun. They took it up at once; the sound was universal, required no language. They 'tattered' between their teeth like busy typewriters in an empty room. Then they moved forward again stealthily and stopped.

The big man crawled closer to the small one and his huge brown hand stretched out like a paw to tap him on the shoulder as he hissed like an alarmed snake. Simultaneously, and unseen by either of us, two wicked looking knives flashed out from under their robes. These they held between their teeth, lips receding from bared pink gums. The giant looked round in our direction whilst the little man stuttered

away like a machine-gun. Releasing the knife from his teeth the giant leaped forward, seized the little man's right ear, and with a vivid downward flash of steel imitated the severance of it from his head. Then they sat up, concealing the long, cruel knives as swiftly as they had drawn them. The charade was over. They grinned and nodded with excitement and pleasure that we had understood their mummary. Then they squatted on their hams in their former position, motionless and intent as if nothing had caused them to move.

'Blimey,' said Dave, the momentary suspense gone. 'The wicked swines. Better 'ave another brew.'

Relieved to be moving and in action again, considering it an emergency, he began to pump up the cooker. The Goums moved nearer to the fire as Dave blew the hot white ash into a flame before putting on the second can. They watched him intently. Only the small man made a slight move, placing his hand gently, persuasively, in the palm of the giant's. There were centuries of patience in their pose.

Watching their button eyes restlessly moving I knew before Dick reached us that he was coming and, glancing over my shoulder, I saw him sauntering slowly, unconcernedly towards us, swinging his beret in his hand and whistling between his teeth.

'Any tchay left?' He stood over me. 'Just brewing up, eh? Good.'

He sat down beside me under the tree. 'Who are your pals, Dave?' he called out.

'Wogs,' said Dave decisively. 'Wogs. An' we're waitin' for you to ask 'em wot they want.'

'They speak French,' I added. 'At least I believe they do. Try them.'

Dick glanced over in their direction and they smiled back at him, dark red lips receding over deep, snow-white teeth set firmly in bright pink gums.

'They're not wogs, Dave.'

'Corse they're wogs. Old Greeno sez they're Goums. Come from Morocco.'

'But Goums aren't wogs —'

'As far as I'm concerned they're wogs. I ain't seen nothin' but wogs since I left 'ome, an' when I git back I never want ter see a wog again — not even on the flicks,' he added bitterly, staring imperturbably into the fire.

'You've missed a good show,' I said, and I told him all about the charade.

Dick thought a moment, then sitting up he spoke to them rapidly in French. They nodded eagerly, smiling like children.

'Who said they spoke French?' asked Dick in an offended, suspicious tone. 'I've asked them twice what they want and they just sit there like a couple of grinning apes.'

'P'r'aps it's your French.' Dave's voice was quiet but intuitive with all his Cockney sagacity. Then rising he said: 'I'll give 'em a brew, they'll understand that.'

He filled a chipped enamel mug, not his I noticed, but mine, and went across to them.

'Ere,' he said. '*Boire. Kwise. Tea bong* an' when yer've drunk it yer can push orf. Savvy? Sling yer 'ook.' In spite of his words his voice was kind.

They grinned again but made no move. Then the giant released the other's brown hand and rose to his immense height like a jinn appearing from the earth in a pantomime. It would not have surprised me in the least had he slowly folded his arms, bowed thrice and in a deep voice said: 'You command, my master.' But still genially smiling he pointed to the brew can, his arched eyebrows expressing his unspoken request.

Dave lifted the blackened can inquiringly and the giant's smile widened, reaching out his enormous hand for the tin which he took gently and courteously, tipping out the water before putting his fingers in to extract the sodden mass of leaves at the bottom. This he did intently, forming a pad in the cupped palm of his hand, gave a command in a strangely high-pitched voice to the little man who picked up an empty tin from the ground and went over to him.

The giant put the rissole shape of tea into the rusty tin,

tipping the can right up until every single one of the grouts was removed. The little man arranged it carefully and with extraordinary concentration, as if it were good tobacco, before bending over the jagged lid to half close it. The giant, with a very broad smile of gratitude and pleasure and a gentle, courteous gesture handed the tin back to Dave who took it. The giant, pointing his finger towards the westering sun nodded his head.

'They mean they're going to dry it in the sun,' I said, then immediately regretted having spoken as I saw the scorn in Dave's face.

'Ere, Greeno,' he said with deliberation. 'I don't know wog language 'n' I don't know French,' he paused. 'But I understand signs. Ain't got a deaf 'n' dumb sister fer nothin'.'

'Sorry, Dave,' I said.

'S'alright.' His quick anger had gone and he turned once more to the giant.

'Tchay you want, is it?' He stepped over to the lorry with its back down, climbed up and jumped down again with a tall Olio tin in his hand. In the tin he had flung about two pounds of tea.

'Ere y'are, Johnny. Take it. It's all yours.'

The giant stared at him, his eyes wide with surprise, then as he realized the magnitude of the gift a most beautiful smile made his face radiant. He took the tin, holding it as if it were a mine, still looking with puzzlement at Dave.

'Go on, it's yours. It won't go orf. Take it 'ome to the Missus. Or maybe you 'aven't got a missus the way you 'old 'is 'and.'

The giant, all doubt gone as if Dave's unintelligible speech had a reassuring tone, smiled once more just like a child with a brightly painted toy. Then rapidly, still in that incongruously high-pitched voice, he said something to the little man whose hand moved swiftly to the inside of his long gown, reappearing with a thin, oblong shaped tortoiseshell box like an old-fashioned snuff container.

This the giant took from him and moving towards Dave he held it out, offering it to him.

'Wot do I do now?' asked Dave. 'It's my move – or shall I 'uff 'im?'

'You'll have to take it,' I said. 'It is an exchange of gifts. Old tribal custom or something.'

'E's too big a bloke to upset,' said Dave.

'Go on, take it. Can't offend the bloke,' added Dick.

Dave held out his hand shyly, as much a child as the giant in his actions, and took the tortoiseshell box.

'Thanks, Johnny. You send the tea 'ome 'n' I'll send the box. Savvy? *Kwise* box,' he added.

The giant grinned with pleasure, patting the can of tea and pointing to the box. Dave patted the box and pointed to the can of tea; and whilst they stood there bowing and smiling like miming Mandarins the expression on the face of the dwarf was inscrutable.

Then the two Goums went slowly away, hand in hand as they had come, and we watched their robed figures pass over the road and out of sight in the trees on the other side. It seemed more than ever as if we had been to the theatre and now, just before the curtain fell, we were watching the principal actors leaving the stage, but the climax was still to come.

'What's the gift?' asked Dick suddenly and the sound of his voice broke what had, for us all in our attitudes of watching stillness, become a tension.

Dave looked down at the box, fumbling to open it, then his fingers unconsciously pressing a hidden spring the lid snapped open.

'Holy Moses,' he shouted, and his big red face blanched. 'Blimey. Wot do I do wiv these? And you said it was a gift?'

I peered over his shoulder into the little oblong box. Dick stepped nearer to look. In a neat row lay five dried and shrivelled ears.

